MR. BAILEY-MARTIN

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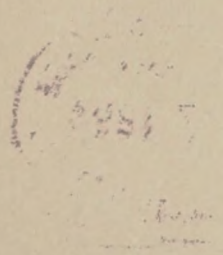

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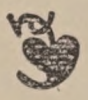

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MR. BAILEY-MARTIN.

CHAPTER I.

All my life I have had an intense admiration of the unvarnished truth. It may be that we all esteem veracity so highly because it is a luxury too often denied us by the accident of circumstance. In the following confessions I propose to take off the closely fitting case by which my "self" is covered and let all the world see the mainspring of my character. My purpose is entirely a moral one. It will be revealed as my story unfolds.

I know I had a grandfather because I have heard my father speak of his father, who was not, he said, "so indulgent a parent as himself." Beyond this my family history is obscure. It is, like that of kindred ancient families, lost in the mists of antiquity. There is a great deal in blood and bone, even when it comes through a line of progenitors unidentified with two exceptions. My grandfather started a small grocer's shop in a by-street near Charing Cross. Modern improvements have obliterated the original place of business. My father was a man of enterprise and ability. He succeeded my grandfather and was Martin the Second. There has been no Martin the Third. I am

Percival Bailey-Martin, a hyphenated aristocrat and an ex-member of Parliament. Mine is the autobiography you are to read.

Under my father's administration the business rapidly extended and we, his offspring, grew with it, our ambition—especially my ambition—increasing with the family prosperity. In my early years from the parlour behind the shop, educated, no doubt, to the practice, I have cried "Shop, father!" to warn him of the arrival of a customer, and have seen him, in the absence of his assistant, sell half-a-pound of sugar to a child scarcely able to look over the counter. But this is amongst my earliest memories—a vision seen far off as though in another existence. From the dim by-street we migrated to Brixton, thence to the rural delights of Surbiton. The shop blossomed into The Amalgamated Oloptic Stores, Limited. The Martins became the Bailey-Martins—my mother's name was Bailey so the title was not usurped—and the family naturally assumed in time their rightful place amongst the suburban aristocracy. My father was a bustling, pushing man, and not thin-skinned, none of the Bailey-Martins are thin-skinned; my mother, a managing woman full of a sort of coarse tact on which her schemes for social advancement throve—and although the City men and their ladies were inclined to look down on us at first (this is when I was very young), we soon worked our way into the best set, where we moved on equal terms with members of the Stock Exchange with whom we vied in splendour. Our neighbourhood was, in the slang of our day, a "stylish" one, and my father said, and we all agreed with him, that it was "just as cheap to know nobs as snobs and much more honourable." In those days I had not learned to be ashamed of the English *bourgeoisie*,

although from a comparatively early age the kind of vulgarity they suffered from vexed me. It happened that I was more intelligent than my brother, who was rightly supposed to have inherited my father's business capacity, so it was decided that I should go into one of the professions—"the Church if possible," said my mother—whilst the education of my brother was destined to be of that uncertain sort vaguely described as commercial. Consequently whilst he was despatched to a neighbouring collegiate school where the young gentlemen spoke with a cockney accent, and wore caps ornamented with neat gold bands, which gave them the military appearance enjoyed by German bandsmen, and caused them to be despised by the pupils of more aristocratic centres of learning, I was conducted to a preparatory establishment at the seaside to be trained for a public school. It was there that I formed my first conception of the world. Until the age of eleven I had enjoyed my share of teaching at the prim hands of the governess who ministered to the intellectual requirements of my only sister. Her teaching was, I admit, narrow, although sound of its kind. This estimable lady believed in manliness, and took us for endless walks through Surbiton, Esher, and the neighbourhood, at a considerable speed, to help us to become athletic. When Miss Spencer discoursed of manliness and informed us what excellent athletes certain distant family connections of hers happened to be, her voice became almost base in quality. She induced our mother to make us take cold baths every morning, for at that time the cold-tubbing mania was at its height. To take a warm bath in the morning was considered in certain circles in Surbiton almost as improper as going to chapel. Beyond teaching me to read in a

virile style and insisting on cold baths and long walks, there was no particular system in Miss Spencer's method of juvenile training. She, however, was acquainted with the elements of Latin; the pronunciation of which she altered continually in accordance with the most recently discovered plan, and had a voluble acquaintance with the French tongue, as it is spoken in England—a dialect, after all, possessing considerable advantages over the French of Paris, as it enables the natives of this country to understand each other in what they fancy is a foreign tongue. After Miss Spencer had taught me to pretend to like cold baths and pedestrian exercise—to conjugate my French verbs so cleverly that my first French teacher mistook it, as he said, for "*du chinois*," and having in turn introduced me to Sisero, Kikero, and Chichero, her task with me was declared ended, and I was launched on the moving scene of life at a preparatory school. The Bailey-Martins are not an emotional family, and the incident took place quietly enough. I shook hands with my father, and my brother, who had just donned his scholastic cap with the gold band, kissed my sister, and, under my mother's care, left Surbiton for the fashionable watering-place where the Reverend Theophilus Bland received "twenty-five pupils, the sons of noblemen and gentlemen of position, to prepare for the public schools." My mamma was then a stout, placid lady with rather unchanging blue eyes and an exaggerated notion of the importance of her own opinions. She was always ready with a "now, I will tell you what I think," and when, for instance, the subject happened to be the value of the dead languages or the revised edition of the Bible, her oracular utterances did not always throw light upon the question.

"Now, I will tell you what I think, Percival," she said to me, as we drove along the sea front on a blustering day in April to the school. "You know Mr. Bland's terms are rather high but he has a first-class connection" —my mother was very much fascinated by first-class connections ;—"and some of your fellow-pupils are the sons of very high people with whom it is a privilege to associate. Mr. Bland told your father he had the son of a peer, the grandson of a bishop, and at least three or four honourables under his care. Your father and I think such an excellent opportunity of making friends will not be lost, and, as I wish you some day to go into the Church, think how useful to you it would be, with God's blessing, to know people who possibly might have the gift of a good living. You understand me, Percival, my dear, I am sure."

I did, so I said "Yes, ma," as the fly drove up before the imposing residence of the Rev. Theophilus Bland, which seemed to be gazing across the wind-vexed sea with a look of aggressive respectability, the result of the constant polish to its exterior and the remarkable refinement of the aristocratic atmosphere prevailing within.

My feelings, on entering the precincts of preparatory learning, were of a mixed character. We had no peers at Surbiton, and I thought it would be a great advantage to live on terms of equality with one of them. I had frequently heard "a lord" spoken of with bated breath, and already it seemed to me that my own importance became greater from the fact of my approaching proximity to one.

On the top of the stairs as we entered we had a glimpse of a plump little boy in tears. I remember I despised him for this weakness, for I had no inclination

to weep; curiosity and expectancy were stronger than regret at leaving home.

The Rev. Theophilus Bland was a tall man with grey whiskers, a high nose, and long, prominent teeth. He said he was glad to see me, and asked if "my mother would take a glass of sherry or anything," a vague offer of hospitality that she wisely rejected.

"This, Rev. Bland," she said, "is Percival, and I hope he will be a credit to you."

Then my mother talked and Mr. Bland and I listened.

"Percival," she said, "is a good boy, a tidy boy, an intelligent boy—and what I consider of still greater importance,—a plodding boy. We intend him to go into the Church if we can, and I will tell you what I think, Mr. Bland, with such a high calling in prospect he cannot begin too soon to think seriously of his future."

Mr. Bland had bowed slightly at every point of my mother's criticism of myself and when she had finished he fixed an impartial eye on me.

"We will see what we can make of him, madam," he said; "I suppose we must begin at the beginning as usual."

"I think not," said my mother, "for Miss Spencer, our governess, has instructed him in the elements of Latin, English, French, arithmetic, geography, history and a knowledge of Scripture."

"That," said Mr. Bland, raising his eyebrows, "is satisfactory; "I trust he may not have to unlearn what he has already acquired, as is too often the case with people who have been taught at home."

Mr. Bland I found had a great objection to little boys being taught at home. "Home training might be economical," he said, "but it was invariably defective."

I remember vividly this first introduction to the

schoolmaster, because my eyes were opened by it. For, directly my mother had gone, suddenly his manner changed and he put his hands into his pockets and closed his lips and looked at me with the utmost indifference. This rather hurt my feelings, for I had felt convinced the account my mother had given of my qualities must have impressed him.

"Now, young what's-yer-name," he said, "I think we had better go to the school-room."

"Percival Bailey-Martin," said I.

"Indeed," said he, "come on."

And he lead the way down a passage into a high long room built out into an arid gravel yard where I found a number of boys of my own age doing nothing in particular with an air of deep depression.

"They are all rather down on their luck," said Mr. Bland as he surveyed the gloomy throng. "Now then, boys," he said, "don't look as though you were in a penitentiary. Here's a new chap; his name's Martin."

Then he shut me in and departed, whilst the boys gathered round.

"What's your name?" said the biggest lad.

"Percival Bailey-Martin," said I.

"Any relation to Martin, our chemist," I wonder.

"Certainly not," said I, "my father lives at Surbiton and is a private gentleman."

"Rather a rum place for a private gentleman to live!" said another boy. "Beastly low place Surbiton. Chock-full of London tradespeople. My aunt lives in Hampton Court Palace and I've heard her say so."

Here was quite a new aspect of things. I had never heard Surbiton spoken of disrespectfully before. My parents, I knew, had gone there because of "the

excellent society it afforded." "I must be careful what I say," thought I.

"Yes, it is rather a beastly hole," I said, coolly. "We can't quite stand the people. But, I say, what sort of school is this? I sha'n't stop if I don't like it."

"I hate it," said the boy with the aristocratic pensioner relative at Hampton Court, "but my mater believes in old Bland, so here I stick."

"I shouldn't stand that if I were you," said I. "I always make my people let me do as I like, and I've come here just to see if this place suits me or not."

The value of bounce, you will perceive, I had already discovered. It had made an impression on my new companions, although I heard one fellow, a tall supercilious-looking boy, exclaim: "What a young Bounder!" a term of opprobrium then new to me.

"Are you going to Eton?" asked one lad.

"P'r'a'ps," said I. "My people will let me go where I like."

"I wonder why you learn anything if you can do that?"

"Well, I only do learn what suits me," I replied.

"Look here, young Martin," interposed the tall supercilious lad who had called me a "Bounder," "we have had enough of your swagger, so just shut up, or you'll be well kicked."

So I "shut up," coming, however, to a rapid decision which I ever after remembered, that, to get on in life, not too much swagger, but just swagger enough, is most needed. With a beginner the amount is an unfixed quantity and only discoverable by experience.

CHAPTER II.

I THINK it is M. About who says that children are what nature has made them, whilst men and women have been moulded by the clumsy hands of Society. This is true, to a certain extent. Looking back to my sojourn at Bland's school, I feel it is a half truth. It is true, for instance, in the case of Lambert, the boy who threatened to kick me for "swagger." He was perfectly natural, and, as he said, never cared "a blow for anything so long as he didn't do things to make him feel like a skunk." But with me, About's dictum is not true. I was the outcome of my environment. I meant to "get on" like all the Bailey-Martins, so I took good care only to make friends that were useful—to make friends in the language of pulpit oratory, of "the mammon of unrighteousness." Lambert used to snub young Lord Righton and call him a "milksop," whereas I made myself his *fidus Achates*. I listened with silent admiration when, in answer to my inquiries, he told me how many ponies he had at home, and said I should like to see them.

"Why," said the good-natured little lord, "I'll ask 'em to have you stay with me in the holidays if you'd re'lly like to see 'em so much. I wish you had to ride 'em instead of me. Riding beastly rot."

The little nobleman was a rather anæmic and thin-

blooded member of the aristocracy. When Lambert said he was a "milksop" he described him accurately. So I wrote home and said perhaps Righton—"Lord Righton, you know, mamma, the Earl of Marlington's eldest son, is going to ask me to stay next holidays at Righton House." My mamma took good care all Surbiton should know it. It is true I didn't go on this occasion, but the glory to the family was just the same.

Mamma wrote to me and said I ought to invite Lord Righton to stay with us, but when I broached the subject he said it wasn't possible. "You see, Martin, my Gov'ner never heard of yours and everyone knows mine."

"That may be, but ours is a very old family, only my Gov'ner's such a retiring fellow," I replied.

This was in evening school, whilst I was busy writing Righton's Latin exercise for him, as usual. He yawned, I remember, and said, "I wish it was bedtime."

I had not been long at school before Bland made me a monitor—a duty all the other fellows shirked. It did not carry with it any particular dignity, but it gave me an opportunity of prying into other boys' affairs, and of reading any letters that might be lying in their desks. My duties were to remain behind every evening, and look round the school-room to see if the books and exercises of my fellow-pupils were put away, and to report any boy "for want of order." This gave me an interesting opportunity of learning something about their home affairs, which, in such a seminary as ours, could not but be useful. Lambert said "it wasn't fit work for a gentleman, but well suited to such a sneak as Martin," a saying for which I at the first opportunity reported him for untidiness. He was angry and

violent in consequence, and nearly smothered me under my own pillow in the dormitory—the only revenge he could take, inasmuch as my vindictive cries of "Shut up, Lambert," must have been heard by the authorities supping below, had not the corner of the pillow, inserted so far in my mouth as to touch my uvula, stifled my complaints.

I went home at the end of the term with my stock of worldly wisdom increased, and my horizon extended. There is nothing that expands the mind of a member of the middle classes more than mingling with the aristocracy from an early age. He thus learns in his youth the actual value of social distinctions—distinctions that in these days of vulgar confusion, are likely to be forgotten—and if he happen to be a lad of tact and intelligence, his opportunities will not be wasted in after life. "How the boy is improved!" said my mother, on the evening of my return. My polished manners and distinguished accent were compared (greatly to his disadvantage) with those of my brother Robert, fresh from his commercial academy.

"Well," said my father, "Percival's school bill is double Bob's, so it isn't fair to expect the same article."

"We'll see which is the best to wear, pa," said Robert, naturally a little nettled at the comparison.

"There are no little lords at Robert's school," interposed my sister. "You can't expect him to be so pompous as Percival."

"Hush, child," said my mother; "he's not pompous, he's only gentlemanly."

All this conversation was not actually in my presence, but I overheard part of it from the hall when the drawing-room door was open.

Robert, my sister Florence, and I, went to several

juvenile parties that Christmas, where we were much admired, and my refined manners were an excellent advertisement to Bland's Preparatory School. As a matter of fact, I rather overdid the thing, but my tact soon showed me this was necessary. If I had been too quiet, my excellent manners and address might have been overlooked, for we like things *prononcé*, as they call it at Surbiton.

All the ladies asked me how my young friend, Lord Righton, was. I said, "Righton is very well, thank you; I am going to stay with him next holidays."

This was not exactly true then, although it became so. I cultivated him so carefully, and gave him so much assistance in his studies, that Lady Marlington sent me an invitation, through Mr. Bland, to the delight of my parents. It is true Florence said she ought to have written to my mother, but the slight was too trifling to moderate the family rejoicing at the honour.

Now looking back I am aware all this appears trivial. You see the past in my confessions stripped of all its trappings. I was born of the world "worldly." All Surbiton admired wealth and aristocratic connections above all things, for are not these the gods of the middle classes? As I became better acquainted with the world, I found the Church had no attractions for me. Mr. Bland was a clergyman, and evidently thought little of his profession. My mother had still hankerings after it, for although not exactly devout, she had an instinctive veneration for the Established Church; as well as a fair share of the superstitious side of religion, and to her a son in the Church seemed a sort of moral lightning conductor to ward off the unknown dangers associated with cemeteries, undertakers, thunder-storms, and dark passages. But my father said,

"Percival can do better." So I determined to do better.

I spent nearly all the Easter holidays with Lord Righton. The Lord and the Countess were on the Riviera, and Lady Gertrude's governess, Miss Gilbert, did the honours. I confess it was rather dull—duller far than home,—but there was a feeling of glory in it. The governess was rigid and frigid; Lady Gertrude, who was several years older than myself, not half so pretty or amusing as my sister Florence; Righton, as usual, listless and apathetic. He and his sister were dosed with cod-liver oil three times a day by Miss Gilbert.

"Ask Martin to have some," young Righton said, "I don't see why he shouldn't have some too. He's growing and his blood's thick."

"Would you like some?" asked the grim Miss Gilbert.

"Do have some, Percival," entreated Lady Gertrude, who had already acquired a woman's love for the medicine chest. "I am sure you have a weak chest."

"Thank you, Miss Gilbert," said I, determined to do my best to please my young host and hostess, "perhaps I had better have some, as Lady Gertrude is kind enough to think it will do me good."

So I was drenched with cod-liver oil, which I swallowed without a wry face in order to set young Righton a good example. The oil-taking after this became of daily occurrence, and made me glad when my visit terminated.

When my mother met me at the station, she found me "looking bilious," and concluded it was the rich and aristocratic cookery to which I had been accustomed. She never learnt what was the real cause.

To permit myself to be dosed in this way, in order to

ingratiate myself with Lady Gertrude, was one of those errors into which we fall at first in our anxiety to propitiate those who sit in the high places of the world. To anyone with a glimmer of humour it must have presented me in a comic light, and this at the time I overlooked. The discomfort it entailed, moreover, was of proportion to the end in view. I perceived this when I had swallowed the first nauseous dose, but having put my hand to the plough (excuse the metaphor, it is not a happy one), I determined not to turn back. The worst of the matter was that Righton told the fellows at school.

"Just fancy trying to 'suck up' to a fellow's people by taking cod-liver oil," was the contemptuous remark Lambert made when he heard of it. "You're safe to be made a Lord Mayor one of these days, Martin; a cod rampant on a yellow shield would be a capital crest for you. I don't suppose you've been a swell long enough to have one. In the days of chivalry, you know, coats-of-arms were given for some daring deed; so you ought to be rewarded for the beastly oil you lapped down."

The fellows thought this very amusing, and the story is still told of me to my disadvantage by my school-fellows.

I left Bland's at fourteen, the same term as Lord Righton, and followed him and several other of my school-fellows to Harrowby. My three years' preparation had taught me much. I soon learnt to employ a vulgar but expressive metaphor not "to lay it on too thick."

I determined to make a mark at Harrowby, and I succeeded. When one knows how, and is fairly well equipped physically, as I was, this is not difficult. To be "good at games" is the first essential; to be a capable

scholar is not so important, but nevertheless carries credit along with it. I soon learnt to play cricket decently, and though I was never in the eleven, I was in measurable distance of reaching the honour. I was captain of "our house" eleven,—I acquitted myself creditably at foot-ball, took several little cups home to my admiring parents for second places gained on various occasions in consolation races. Though I left Harrowby without getting into the Sixth, I was fairly high up in the "Upper Fifth." I was removed in order to spend a year on the Continent to learn French. I pass over my school days briefly. English Public Schools are excellent training institutions. It is there a boy learns a sense of proportion in social things that is of the greatest use to him afterwards, if he belong to the middle class. He learns, for instance, to despise "a swot"—as we used to call a lad who had a taste for literature—tastes which Harrowby in my day did not alleviate. He also learns how he ought to have his trousers cut in order to shine in polite society, and to respect the beauty and gloss of the tall hat. The very slang he picks up gives him distinction when he goes home. He is made in truth an elegant sort of Philistine who despises poverty, admires display, and considers field sports a passport to statesmanship. Harrowby in my time was a microcosm, and, an intelligent microbe in that miniature world, I learnt to swagger with the best, and to leer at the young ladies in the confectioners' shops, with unblushing effrontery. In the holidays brother Bob used to take me as copy, and to set the fashion at his commercial academy with me for a model. My sister Florence, I admit, was accustomed to laugh at me, but her sense of humour was always an exaggerated one; humour, if she be

excepted, not being the strong point of the Bailey-Martins. I am inclined to think its possession a somewhat doubtful advantage. Men and women at the best are rather ridiculous beings, and if they are spared a knowledge of the fact by their own dulness, the loss has its compensations; imagine what a life of self-torture my father's, my mother's, Bob's life and my own life must have been, if we had looked on life with the eye of William Makepeace Thackeray, who wrote a book about snobs, in which none of us could find anything funny. When I went to school at the Rev. Theophilus Bland's I think I must have formed my plans for the future. My object, no doubt already sufficiently clear, was to climb up a rung in the social ladder. I cannot recollect when the purpose first dawned clearly in my youthful mind. Looking back it seems as if I must have inherited it like an instinct. Retrievers—a race of dogs, originally, I suppose, the result of cross breeding—have now the advantages of a long series of ancestors between themselves and the stock from which they sprung. To-day, dogs come into the world with the retiring instinct as an inheritance. My studies into the mysteries of natural history are superficial, and readers with a deeper tincture of the science may perhaps contradict my conclusion. It rests on no stronger authority, so far as I am aware, than the uncertain recollection of somebody else's assertion. I once heard someone or other make this statement about retrievers. Let its accuracy be granted for the sake of argument, in order to account in a similar manner for my own mental precocity. From the earliest age I longed to be someone of importance, and I believe the desire is due to heredity. How useful the Darwinian theory has become as an explanatory system! I instinctively

worshipped wealth just as the retrievers of my parallel (if not of actual existence) fetch and carry soon after their eyes are open. My father had flourished and expanded amongst a small plutocracy of a London suburb, and had in that satisfied his ambition. I, however, started where he began, and with Harrowby behind me and Oxford before me, was by no means able to rest content with a "house and grounds" overlooking the river and the trees of Bushy Park beyond. This goal might suit brother Bob, who had now a post under my father in the "Amalgamated Oloptic," well enough, but, for an enterprising young man who had more than once been the guest of a peer, it meant what I had recently learnt in France to call a *carrière manquée.*

I was nineteen when I returned from a year's residence in Paris under the tuition of a "highly recommended" Protestant pasteur. This reverend gentleman, who dwelt at Passy, let us do pretty nearly what we liked, so long as we did not bother him. We were not exacting, and the twelve months three of my young fellow-countrymen and myself spent under the roof of this excellent man passed pleasantly and, I think, not unprofitably. I regretted afterwards that the constant use we made of our own tongue, added to an uninterrupted perusal of *The Sporting Times* and similar literature, prevented me from acquiring any facility in the language of the country. But I certainly made the best of my opportunities to pick up the French of Paris as it is spoken at the *Palais Royal* theatre and amongst the *habitués* of the Eden, and so long as we did not wake up *ce cher Monsieur Patry*, as the small colony of French Calvinists shepherded by our pious instructor called him, our late hours were not com-

mented upon. It is true he sometimes languidly inquired at breakfast whether we had enjoyed Racine at the *Comédie Française*, which respectable and national institution was supposed to be the only place of dramatic entertainment we frequented,—but the good man was discreet and refrained from questioning us too closely on the performance. If our dear mammas had only known—but never mind, whose early career will bear close investigation by a parent of evangelical proclivities?

CHAPTER III.

"And now," said my father, the day after my return, (via Dieppe for economy but with depressing results,) "what do you intend to do, Percival?"

"I should like to go up to Oxford," I replied. "Lord Righton is 'up' now and a lot of other old Harrowbians, and I think, as Bob's in business, one of us ought to go into the professions."

"I thought, Percival," said my mother, "you were desirous of entering the Church?"

"I don't think I am quite good enough for that, mamma," I replied. meekly. "The Church requires qualities which I am afraid I haven't got."

"But you would acquire them at Oxford, Percival, surely," said she.

"Dr. Winch, who's likely to become a bishop, mamma, our old head-master, thinks I am not fitted for the Church."

My mother's face fell. She no doubt beheld me in a vision preaching an eloquent discourse at Surbiton to all the "best people"; the image was, I knew, a favourite one with her. "O, Percival, I have always looked forward to your taking Holy Orders. I shall write to Dr. Winch."

"O don't do that, mamma," said I, anxiously, for old Winch had entirely ignored my future career and was

hardly aware of my existence. "Before I left he sent for me and I told him you wished me to be a clergyman. 'You can do better than the Church, Bailey-Martin,' he said; 'you are cut out for the law. Go to Oxford and be called to the Bar afterwards. The Church will be disestablished before you could get a living, and then what would you do?'"

"What will *he* do then?" asked my sister, looking up from her novel, and suspicious I was inventing this conversation for the exigencies of my new position.

"My dear Florence," I said, "I am merely giving you his opinion. The Established Church may last his time but not mine."

"Well, I hope they won't disestablish the Bar," said she, "that would be unlucky for you."

My mother looked at me a moment gloomily, my father critically. "I think, my dear, Dr. Winch was right. Law for the successful few is better than the Church; we get a lot of law business at the 'Oloptic,' which might be put in Percival's hands."

The "Oloptic" had just lost a case. They had been selling the "Oloptic Blend" at half a crown a pound, and had described it as the best Ceylon tea, but experts discovered it contained only second tea dust from China and Indian sweepings, consequently the "Oloptic" was fined £20, and had to pay considerable legal costs into the bargain.

"You don't find such a good class of men in the Church now as you used to," said I, gravely, after a moment's pause.

"So I fancy," replied my father. "There's a church here where the congregation supplement the curate's salary by an annual collection. It wasn't like that when I was a lad. Either rectors could afford to pay

or the class from which the clergy were drawn were—were——"

My father hesitated for a word, as he sometimes did. He was a fairly fluent man, but occasionally gasped for a term which one of his family, Florence usually, supplied.

"Less impecunious," she suggested.

"Thank you, Florence, yes, less impecunious."

"But you could make Percival an allowance, papa," interposed my mother. "I could never endure the idea of a child of mine being supported by 'voluntary contributions!'"

"Nor I either," I said. "I should blush myself to death whilst the plate was being handed round. But you see papa can just as well make me an allowance whilst I am at the Bar. I couldn't support myself all at once. He would find the money better laid out in that way." This with a winning and ingenuous smile. I always regarded money in a light and airy manner, especially when it was not my own.

"I dare say I can," said papa, "if I find you are worth sinking capital in. But look here, I have just had Mooshure Patry's bill, and see there's a considerable amount of pocket-money against you."

"You told me to go to him when I wanted anything," said I, "and going about in Paris to pick up the best accent is expensive."

"Of course it is," said Florence, "a second best accent is shocking. And you have picked up a fine one! You talk quite French French!"

"My dear," interposed my mother, "don't be satirical. It is unbecoming in a girl to try to be witty. M. Patry assures us Percival is a very excellent French scholar."

"I shall be able to take up modern languages at Oxford, if you decided on my going there," said I to my father as an excuse for the expense of the accomplishment. "I had a letter from Righton the other day, and he said he hoped I was coming up. He's in the best set. They've made themselves into a club, 'The One Button Club.' He wants me to join."

"The Righton connection, of course, is a valuable one," said my father. "But understand this, Percival, if you go to the University, I will stand no nonsense. You are to mind your books and not be dissipated."

"Percival dissipated!" exclaimed my mother indignantly. "Boys are only dissipated who have been badly brought up."

"I hope I have no taste for idleness or dissipation," said I with an injured air. "My object is to get on in life, to be a credit to you and mamma."

This little speech irritated Florence; my little speeches often did.

"What do the boys do at the 'One Button Club?'" she said.

"When boys go up to the 'Varsity," said I, "they call themselves 'men.' 'College isn't school.'"

"Well, what do the 'men' do then?"

"They wear one brass button on their dress coats and meet at one another's rooms."

"What do they do there?"

I found afterwards, as then I guessed, that they smoked and drank, and told doubtful stories, just as we did at old Patry's, only on a manlier scale. They had more room for style. Instead of smuggling a bottle of cheap cognac and a packet of strong flavored Caporal cigarettes into the bedroom, they drank dear but nasty wine, and smoked Partagas at a shilling a

piece. Otherwise the difference was trifling. Had they realised the juvenile orgies of the "men" my parents would have been dreadfully shocked, even although Righton was a lord, to whom, of course, some latitude is allowed.

The club was, in his words, "doosid smart don't cher know," but I did not tell this to my family.

"Lord Righton is getting quite sharp at Oxford," I said.

"Ah, Percival, you always helped Lord Righton at school with his lessons," said my mother, admiringly. "It would be very nice for you two to be together again. Papa! you must enter Percival's name on the books of Lord Righton's college as soon as possible."

When she said this I knew I should have my way. My parents, no doubt, discussed the matter together. My father was a little "close" with his money when he could not see any immediate return for it, but my mother persuaded him I was capable of becoming Lord Chancellor if given a fair chance. So it came to pass, soon after my return from pretending to learn French, I found myself a knowing Freshman at Oxford, and an energetic member of the "One Button Club." But if I were to describe my university-life I should have little space left for the remainder of my story. If any young man ever profited by his residence there I did. I took all the polish it had to give; knew, to a nicety, what to admire and what to despise. You really must go to College to learn this.

I availed myself probably even more of the social advantages offered me than of the opportunities of "mental culture" afforded by that ancient seat of learning. "Remember, Percival," I used to say to myself, "the best is only good enough for you." I set to work

persistently to cultivate the best set. Some of the men attempted to snub me, but it was not an easy matter. I was never prompt to take offence and I conquered in the end. I had a way of finding out the weaknesses of others and of working on them. Besides, flattery with the young is a powerful weapon. To adapt yourself to other people's whims and make yourself agreeable is a sure way to popularity, with a very large percentage of the human race. But I was never a tuft-hunter —never! I was received into the best set on my own merits. After all, the right sort of friends are of more value to a man than an Honour's Degree, unless he is going to be a parson or a pedagogue. But I took mine. My parents imagined it a magnificent intellectual feat. A good many of the members of the "One Button Club" never grew out of the undergraduate stage. Lord Righton, for instance, never took his, nor Murgatroyd, who went into the Guards, nor Bertie Henshawe, Lord Gunsberry's eldest son. I was a good-looking fellow. Every one admitted that, and my relations were justly proud of me. Surbiton was proud of me, and I felt I did her credit. I remember when I came "down" for good I was approaching the idyllic stage, through which we all pass. I felt that all the world was before me, that soon I was to write Barrister-at-law after my name and dwell in chambers in The Temple and be a man about town. Meanwhile all things were prospering with the family. Florence had grown into a very beautiful woman, and the youths of the neighbourhood fluttered around her eagerly wherever she appeared. I remember my father was very angry one morning to find, chalked along his garden wall in letters a foot long, the following words: "I would like to marry Florence Bailey-Martin. She is the prettiest girl in

Surbiton." Fame has its drawbacks. The gardener was ordered to remove this artless confession of admiration, and Florence never saw it. The Bailey-Martins had now become very important people. By this time they were spoken of as "one of the oldest families." Length of residence in a suburban district always confers dignity. The Surbitonians turn up their noses at new-comers, and, sniffing disdainfully, wonder who they are? Surbiton then was split into cliques and the one in which we moved lorded it over all the rest. Now I confess at this time the place had great charms for me. There was the glory—dear to the youthful—of punting on the river in immaculate boating costume and my college colours. To sit in a sailor hat on the cushions in my tent was held to be a place of honour by the young ladies. Ah! these youthful glories! The memory of them is still dear. Freedom, health, happiness, the esteem of acquaintances, all was mine! The sun shines very brightly at Surbiton, the lilac comes out in scented patches, the chestnuts rise like froth on green waves on the stately trees of Bushy, and a human heart is a human heart, under the stiffest shirt front or the tightest stays. These are memories which fill us with romance. You see there is some poetry in me after all, although I never read a poem in my life of my own accord. It was about this time that I discovered something underlying life that I had not suspected. Of course you know what is coming! Yes, you are right, I fell in love. Ah, but wisely, wisely, as you will see. How did it all come about? I cannot tell. In the words of the poet whose works I have read at school "*et militari non sine gloriâ.*" I was now twenty-four, I had a good allowance, perfect freedom, and with such advantages it was not to be expected that, well—you

know what was to be expected. I had read of love in novels and heard it described by the classical poets as a sort of enchantment. But this had been all words, words, words of no more importance than the phrases of a geometrical definition.

"The square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides." Indeed!

> "The sunlight clasps the earth
> And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
> What are all these kisses worth,
> If thou kiss not me?"

I am sure I did not know or care until I heard Edith Lyall sing it. But do not mistake me. I am not about to make a fool of myself and spoil a promising life.

It was a bright summer day, and the river was covered with boats, for it was a local regatta. Bob and Florence had gone on before. I had been loafing idly pretending to read law, but in reality studying a French novel. I decided to go and join them, and made my toilet. At Surbiton we are not ashamed to dress for our mild boating athletics. Personally I never believe in a young man who pretends to despise clothes. It is evidence almost invariably of plebeian origin. It was half-past four; the sun was brilliant and hot; I resplendent in my straw hat, white shirt, and college colours. On my way down to the river I passed Tom Brown—a young man who insisted on claiming acquaintance with me because he had been at Bob's confounded academy. This time I cut him.

In the punt, which Bob had moored under a tree, I found a strange young lady sitting by my sister. They both had large straw hats and white dresses; the sun-

light flickered on to them through the thick green leaves which the wind stirred.

"This is Percival, my eldest brother," said Florence. "Percival, let me introduce you to Miss Lyall, a schoolfellow of mine."

Florence had been to school at Brighton and had many friends, most of whom I had met, although hitherto I had discovered in them nothing to distinguish them from other girls of my acquaintance. Miss Lyall looked up at me graciously and smiled, whilst I removed my straw hat with that peculiar *aplomb* in my day fashionable at the 'Varsity—a salutation full of hidden meaning, indicating a deep knowledge of the world and its ways, a weariness thereof, and a concealed resentment against it for being such a tedious place. Lord Burleigh could signify a great deal by a word; young Oxford suggested a whole moral attitude by a bow.

"Ah-m. How do you do, Miss Lyall?" I said.

"Your sister tells me you have been busy with your books," said Miss Lyall.

She had a little manner of glancing under her lids which—well—which I noticed. Then she lowered her head, and the brim of her hat hid her eyes.

"Papa said he was coming down to take tea in the punt," said Florence when I had found as comfortable a place as Bob's legs would allow.

"I hope he won't," said Bob; "he will make the punt so crowded."

Here a snorting steam launch with the umpire steamed noisily down the course, steered by a fair-haired lady of our acquaintance who had assumed an expression of fixed nautical abstraction for the occasion, whilst the crowds in the boats put on an air of moder-

ate expectancy. All aquatic Surbiton was on the water, and the dandy puntmen were striking their best attitudes. Then came the race, and when it was over Miss Lyall asked me which had won.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," I said; "don't know anything about these local fellows."

"You mustn't imagine Percival is a boating man because he is dressed like one," said my sister.

"Did you not row at college?" inquired Miss Lyall, looking up again from under the drooped eyelids. Was it natural, I wondered, or a dodge?

"I rowed for a short time in my college eight," I said, "but soon gave it up. To be strictly accurate, it gave me up. They tried me and came to the conclusion I couldn't pull my weight."

"That must be very exciting," said Miss Lyall. "Do you ever get excited, Mr. Bailey-Martin?"

We always insisted on our hyphenated title in full, and usually were allotted the distinction.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Florence. "Percival became *blasé* after his second term at Harrowby; a year of Paris extinguished the sparks of youth in him, and now Oxford and the 'One Button Club' have reduced him to settled melancholy."

Florence was laughing at me as usual; I was accustomed to this and ignored her raillery, but I did not wish Miss Lyall to look on me as a ridiculous person.

"As you were at school with Florence, Miss Lyall," I said, "you will be able to make allowances for her."

"Florence is A 1 at a joke," said Bob, whose slang was plebeian from city association.

"Surbiton, I hear," said Miss Lyall, "is not overweighted with wit."

"Refinement and splendour are the strong points of the place," said Florence.

Florence had been spoilt by too much admiration. She was a clever girl. Yes, I must admit, Florence was clever, but peculiar, very peculiar. Before Bob had time to take up the defence of Surbiton, my father arrived on the scene from the station.

"I do wish the Guv'nor wouldn't wear a 'topper' in the punt," said Bob. "I wish you'd give him a hint, Florence."

"What is the good of a hint in our family?" she asked. "I've given out plenty about those white spats of yours."

"Spats are a different thing," said Bob. "But a 'topper' in a punt! I should think even the Gov'nor would draw the line there."

My father was standing on the bank talking to young Brown, whom I had just pretended not to see.

"I hope," I said, "he won't bring him into the punt."

"Why not?" asked Florence; "he's more natural than most the young men."

"Natural!" I retorted. "Oh, yes, he's natural enough, if hob-nails and impudence are a sign of it."

Brown always insisted on calling me Martin, and I resented it.

Then my father stepped into the punt, Bob making way for him. It was always Bob's duty to do the odd jobs—to get out of the way, to go on errands, to fetch and carry generally. As an Oxford man, these lowly offices could not be expected of me, and I took care never to perform them.

"I was asking young Brown to come into the punt," said my father, "but it appears, Percival, you have

made him angry. He says you never know him when you see him."

"And what did you say, papa?" asked Florence.

My father always prided himself on being a thorough man of the world; he may be, but it isn't the world I am accustomed to.

"This is what I said to him," replied my father. "'Look here, Brown,' I said, 'Percival's young, and a bit of a swell. But never you mind, he'll know you fast enough in a year or two.'"

My father evidently thought he had said the right thing.

"And what did Mr. Brown say?" asked Florence.

"Why," replied my father, "he said, 'I'll be hanged if he shall!'"

This story tickled Florence, and she laughed, with an under accompaniment from Miss Lyall.

"My dear Percival," she said, "you really must have an equerry, you must indeed!"

Bob was with difficulty boiling the water with a spirit lamp and Florence preparing the tea. I talked to Miss Lyall. Her mother had just taken a house in Surbiton I discovered, and they knew no one but my sister.

"And how do you like the place?" I inquired.

"Very much. I like the river and the sunshine and the country."

"And the people?"

"I don't know them yet. Our neighbours have not been in a hurry to call."

"The Surbiton people are a little particular," said my father, "but you'll find they will call fast enough when they've found out all about you."

Miss Lyall raised her eyebrows.

"My father means the people are inquisitive," said I, apologetically.

"Rather a select lot, you know," put in Bob from the end of the punt, struggling with the spirit lamp.

"The best selected specimens of suburban aristocrats, Edith, you know. But you must try to put up with them," said my sister.

"They have the reputation for being exclusive," said Miss Lyall, "but I suppose you know everyone here?"

"Well, not everyone exactly," said I; "some of them are impossible."

"Percival means the people who live in the back streets," exclaimed Florence.

"We are just out of the list of the 'impossibles' then," said Miss Lyall. "I suppose we must conduct ourselves with humility, and after a time our existence will be recognised."

Evidently, the Lyalls were not too well off.

This was disappointing.

"You are living with your mamma, I believe?" said my father.

"Yes. My mother is not very strong," replied she.

"This is just the place for her," said my father, with the air of a connoisseur. "The air is very fine."

"If you had supplied it yourself it couldn't have been better, could it, papa?" said Florence, who had finished making the tea which Bob was handing round.

If Bob had made a joke of this kind,—I admit it was impossible, with its reference to the enterprising character of the "Oloptic,"—he would have been promptly "sat upon," but as a commentator Florence was allowed perfect freedom—a privilege of which she constantly availed herself.

"'Supplied it yourself!' ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho!" laughed Bob. "Not bad that, eh?"

"What's not bad?" asked my father.

"Why, 'supplied it yourself,'" explained Bob.

"Supplied what myself?"

"The air."

"What air?"

"Why, this air."

"What's the silly fellow mean, Florence?" asked my father.

"These are the dangers of the comic man," said she. "I really don't know."

"No; nor anyone else either."

"Why! this is always happening," grumbled Bob. "Florence says something funny, and when I begin to explain it to the others, she pretends she can't see what I'm driving at. Isn't it a shame, Miss Lyall?"

"It is indeed. Why don't you help your brother?" she said to me.

"Joking's rather bad form, I think," said I; "I leave it to the comic papers."

"Even they can do it better," said Florence. "But that pistol means the last race has started."

When it was over, Florence and I saw Miss Lyall home.

"What do you think of her?" asked my sister, after we had left her friend at her door.

"She's charming. But who are the Lyalls?"

"Well, Mrs. Lyall is Mrs. Lyall, and Edith is Edith. That's all the information I can give you."

"Don't talk nonsense; you were at school with her and must know something about them. They can't be well off or they couldn't live where they do."

"Mrs. Lyall is a widow—Edith her only daughter."

"So I inferred. Who was Mr. Lyall?"

"I've no idea."

"Where did they come from?"

"I've no notion."

"But if we take them up, all Surbiton will be asking who they are, and then when we've given ourselves away Mrs. Temple or the Wottlington-Shoesmiths, or some of that lot, will find out Papa Lyall kept a toy-shop at Brixton, or something equally agreeable, and then where shall we be?"

"In the same elevated atmosphere we are accustomed to breathe, I suppose," she answered, laughingly.

"I've no patience with you, Florence."

"Nor I with you, Percival."

Then looking to the west, I saw the sun sinking behind the great bank of trees in Bushy Park, long beams of slanting light piercing the gaps between the rounded masses. I had never noticed their beauty before.

CHAPTER IV.

We always "got up" a subscription dance at Surbiton, heralded usually in the local paper by allusions to "Mrs. Bailey-Martin's approaching function, at which all the *beau-monde* of the neighbourhood are expected to assemble."

The tickets were to be obtained of my mother and other Lady Patronesses, amongst whom she was a moving spirit. But to what envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness did not this ball give rise in our outwardly smugly self-satisfied community. Now it was "highly select." Only those who have lived in a London suburb can understand the significance of that. It means it was as far as possible restricted to the three or four leading cliques of the place that could mingle without too much friction. "We won't have any outsiders," we said. It is true a stranger can hardly distinguish shades of social distinction amongst "the classes" in suburban society, but I can assure you they are marked. This is how they are formed. A certain number of families of considerable means and a sufficiency of effrontery, by a tacit understanding, form themselves into a "set." They give one another dinners, dances and boating parties, and consider those of their neighbours uninvited "outsiders." Some of these cliques agree occasionally to meet on the perfectly neutral ground of a charity ball, but in their temporary alliance

there is an understanding that the rank and file of outsiders, amongst whom are included all those who pay less than £40 a year for their houses, all those whose occupations are obscure or ill-paid, all those who are new to the place and have come without necessary credentials to a resident of eminence. As the profits of these entertainments are handed over to some local charity, the disadvantages of this sort of refinement need not be dwelt upon. At the approaching dance Lord Righton had promised to be present. He wanted, he said, to see what a dance of "those sort o' people don't-cher-know" was like. The promised presence of an heir to a peerage made the demand for tickets unprecedented. Everyone wanted to come—amongst them several Surbitonians of uncertain position—and the Lady Patronesses decided to refuse tickets right and left. "If," they said, "we don't keep it select, it will be such a dreadful thing for Lord Righton."

Florence and my mother were very busy. Each Lady Patroness had only a certain number of tickets to dispose of, and to save herself annoyance and to be able to refuse them to "outsiders," on the least offensive plea, my mother disposed of hers immediately.

The Lyalls were away, and not expected back in time for the dance, so that Florence had not saved them any tickets. These were strictly limited in number, and were all disposed of except three in the possession of Mrs. Muirhead-Salter, wife of the eminent stock-broker, usually described by her acquaintances with satire as "too grand for the place." To be too grand for Surbiton was to be very grand indeed! She was a good-looking woman of "queenly demeanour," as her friends said (her enemies described it differently), who insisted on her husband sending his own champagne to these

gatherings, but which only her own "set" quaffed. She was also accustomed to stand at the end of the hall where the dances are held, and to send forth her husband amongst the young men of the place to select her partners.

"My wife will be pleased to dance with you," said her emissary to the dancing men, who esteemed it an honour to be thus patronized, and went up meekly in their turns to inscribe their names on her card. It was an imposing sight. The Muirhead-Salters and the Bailey-Martins moved in different cliques, only mingling on these occasions, entertaining all the while much ill-concealed jealousy, and never, when it could possibly be avoided, dancing in the same set.

My mother was rather in awe of Mrs. Muirhead-Salter, but Florence would not allow her to waver, and each family never missed an opportunity of passing a slight on the other. I used to ignore them and describe Mr. Muirhead-Salter, whose "cheek" was merely the pale reflection of his wife's effrontery, as a "Stock Exchange Bounder." But he had a good house, a large income, entertained lavishly, and their position in Surbiton was certainly as strong as ours.

They were very jealous of our capture of Lord Righton, and could only offer in exchange a rather shady Baronet who had come to grief on the Turf, and who was reported to have borrowed some of Salter's easily-earned money.

Edith Lyall and her mother returned unexpectedly two days before the dance, and instead of applying to my mother, Edith was foolish enough to write to Mrs. Muirhead-Salter for tickets, having met the "Queen of Sheba," as we called her, once at a dance in London. Mrs. Salter knew Miss Lyall was a friend and school-

fellow of Florence. Here, therefore, was an opportunity of snubbing us not to be missed. Edith Lyall consequently received the following reply to her ill-advised request: "Mrs. Muirhead-Salter presents her compliments to Miss Lyall, and regrets that she cannot let her have the tickets she requires, as she thinks it only just to keep them for her own friends." Edith, with an angry flush in her face, brought the letter to Florence.

"Of course she refused you," said my sister when we were discussing the matter in the drawing-room. "The Bailey-Martins and the Muirhead-Salters are the Montagues and Capulets of Surbiton. We go about biting our thumbs at one another. Percival calls them 'Bounders,' Mrs. Salter says I am 'bad form' and vulgar, and won't allow her young men to dance with me if she can help it. Mrs. Salter says 'Percival,' is a 'bumptious Oxford boy,' and describes Bob as 'common.' Papa shakes his head and declares 'Salter's made his money in some shady transactions in copper.' Now you have come between our family feuds, and this"—holding up the letter—"is the result."

"What beastly cheek!" said Bob.

"I don't intend to put up with this," said I, "Miss Lyall *must* go."

At this point my mother came in through the open window from the garden. The situation was explained.

"Oh, Miss Lyall!" she said, "how could you be so rash?"

"Poor Edith had no idea of the savages she had fallen amongst, mamma," said Florence. "But now she has been scalped and her flowing locks hung in the Muirhead-Salters' tent as a trophy, we must 'think on vengeance.'"

"How can you be so wicked to talk in that way, Florence?" said mamma. "Mrs. Salter has acted with gross rudeness and impropriety, but I forgive her."

"Of course you do, dear," said my sister, laughing. "You wouldn't pay her out for anything, I'm sure. But how about a ticket for Edith? Everyone has been sold. Let her have yours, mamma. You can stay at home with papa, for I know you hate balls. The boys can look after Edith—who must come with us—and myself."

Finally this was arranged, and then Florence, Edith and I went round the garden. My indignation at Edith's treatment was immense. "I only wish," said I, "Mrs. Salter would send her husband to me to say, 'My wife will be pleased to dance with you.' 'Tell her,' I'd say, 'with my compliments, that I don't dance out of my own set.'"

"I don't think you need be afraid," said Florence; "Bob has a deeper scheme of vengeance. He intends to drink the Salters' champagne by mistake and then to apologize. But these are extreme measures."

"I'm sure I wish the Gov'nor would send some 'fizz' too," said Bob, "I don't like dancing on sour claret cup; why don't you ask him, Florence?"

"For many reasons obscure to your vision, Robert," she replied, "but especially because if he did we should never be able to sneer any more at the Muirhead-Salters for doing it."

"Shocking bad form, isn't it, Miss Lyall?" said I. She was wearing a red cotton dress, and in the sunshine she seemed a very radiant being. I had never liked red before, but it seemed then to burn into the fragrant June air.

"It is peculiar," she said, "but after the 'putting

down' Mrs. Salter has given me you cannot expect me to be a fair critic of her manners."

"What a sweet little Christian!" said Florence.

"How forgiving!" exclaimed I. "Now do you know, Miss Lyall, I couldn't forgive that woman; I am determined to pay her out."

"I hope you won't quarrel with her on my account," said Miss Lyall. "But I must be going."

"I will see you home," said I.

She begged I would not trouble, but I insisted, and finally we walked down the road together, leaving Florence and Bob smiling after us from the gate.

I knew to what I was exposing myself. To be seen walking with a lady at Surbiton is to run the risk of being described all over the place as an engaged couple. Engagements of this nature are as common as "blazers" on the river. I know some young ladies who in rumour have been engaged to every bachelor in the place.

Whilst we were walking along the dusty road towards Boxtree Road, talking of the approaching dance, the improved state of Mrs. Lyall's health, it struck me I had never heard anyone converse so sweetly. The distance was short, too short. It was pleasant to talk to Miss Lyall alone, I thought, away from Florence's keen eyes.

Now we were at the door. They were semi-detached houses with small gardens and—well, not such a house as I should like to live in. If the house had been a big and prosperous Surbiton mansion I should, I believe, have fallen in love with Miss Lyall at once—"let myself go," as it were,—but the sight of it and its little twin brother, with the young laburnum trees and evergreen shrubs put in by contract in the garden, clipped the wings of my budding fancy. Edith Lyall was

beautiful enough to live in a palace, but why didn't she?

"Thank you for seeing me home, Mr. Bailey-Martin," she said.

"Thank you for—er—giving me the honour," said I. "But, Miss Lyall, will you dance with me to-morrow night?"

"Of course."

"How many dances?"

"As many as discretion allows you to take," said she, smiling, "for Florence tells me this is a most censorious place."

"Three," said I, looking up at the house that suggested moderation. "Three valses whenever I like to pick them."

"Certainly," said she; "you will hardly find any competitors, for I know nobody."

"Florence will see you get plenty of partners. Good-bye, Miss Lyall."

Then the red cotton dress went up the narrow steps, the door opened and closed on it, and I went back to lunch, pondering.

We were a little nervous lest Lord Righton should disappoint us. That he was going to honour the dance by his presence was known as far as Wimbledon. The Richmond people envied us. "When he enters the room," they said, maliciously, "all Surbiton will kneel down." This they considered an excellent jest. "The idea of such a thing!" said my mother, when Florence told her of it. "The idea of doing such a thing anywhere but in a place of worship!"

"It's a mere figure of speech, mamma," said Florence.

"I've no patience with such nonsense," said my mother, indignantly; "if Lord Righton heard of it he

would fancy he was going to a party in a lunatic asylum."

"Well, there are worse entertainments than that," said Florence. "There is a local musical party for instance, or a boating party where the young men take their banjoes."

"Percival," said my father, "you had better go up to town and see Lord Righton doesn't forget the promise he gave you. You can have the horses."

The next morning, therefore, I drove up to town, and found Righton, as I expected, on the point of lunching at the Celibate Club.

"You haven't forgotten your promise about the dance to-night, Righton?" said I.

"'Pon my honour, Martin, but I had," he replied, "my mem'ry's beastly."

"Well, I'll drive you back after lunch," said I, to make sure of him and to prevent any of his other acquaintances catching him to take him to the Gaiety, the Alhambra, or a music hall, places of amusement appealing strongly to his tastes.

Then, having sent a telegram to his man ordering him to bring down his things to my father's, I drove him home.

"I suppose you put on dress clothes for these parties of yours, Martin?" said he.

This was mere ignorance on his part, not, as some people would imagine, patrician impertinence.

"Of course," said I. "And you can wear a 'buttonhole,' as big as a haystack too if you like."

"Well, let's stop and send another wire to Perkins to bring me one down," said he. We stopped in the Fulham Road for the purpose. "For," said Righton as we started again, "I should like to do the c'rect thing.

If you chaps wear big bouquets like my mother's footmen when she used to go to a Drawing-room, I'll do the same."

I was strongly tempted to send Edith Lyall a bouquet, but the family discretion prevailed. Women always attribute a meaning to that sort of thing.

Whilst we were driving over Wimbledon Common I thought it wise to introduce Righton in anticipation to my family.

"I think you will like my father," I said, "he's quite a decent old chap; and my mother's a great affection for you because you introduced me into your set at Oxford. They are quiet sort of people, and dislike 'swagger' and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, don't apologize for them," said Righton, in his usual blundering way; "I can get along with anybody. Have you any sisters, Martin? You look one of those rosy-gilled chaps who ought to have pretty sisters."

"Rosy-gilled chaps! anæmic little cad," I thought, but then I remembered he meant it all civilly enough. Matthew Arnold labelled our aristocracy barbarians. Righton was merely one of them.

"Yes, I have a sister and a younger brother. Florence is considered pretty, I believe, and is certainly clever."

"Clever, is she?" said Righton. "That's like my sister Gertrude. I b'lieve you've seen her, Martin. Well, she ain't pretty, as you know, but she's doosid intellectual. She can't stand me at any price, because I'm not lit'r'y and scientific and all that. She's lately taken up a new religion and wanted to explain it all to me. I wasn't going to be bored with it, so I told her the old one was good enough for me. She's been deploring my levity and ignorance, as she called it, ever since."

"Science isn't in your line, Righton," said I, as we stopped at our house, whence to my mortification I beheld my father issuing to welcome his guest. On the top of the steps overlooking the garden was my mother, in her handsomest black brocaded dress. They had evidently been watching for our arrival.

"They are old-fashioned people," I said, "and welcome you in an old-fashioned manner."

Righton looked on in the feebly amused manner habitual to him, with his mouth slightly opened, that gave a still more uncertain outline to his sloping chin.

"This, Lord Righton," said my father, shaking him warmly by the hand, "is an honour we have long looked to. Let me help you to descend."

For Righton still sat in the phaeton, from which he got down leisurely.

Then he walked into the house.

"My dear Lord Righton," exclaimed my mother, "delighted beyond measure to see you. Percival has told us of your goodness to him."

"How de do?" said Righton. "Very kind, I'm sure. Capital 'gees' those of yours. Nice drive from Town. Expect my man down by train with my traps. Nice pleasant place you've got here, to be sure, Mr. Martin."

My parents seemed relieved at Righton's condescension. But I thought it wise to rescue him, for the sight was not quite agreeable to filial eyes. If I left them I knew they would more easily recover from the excitement of his visit. I had expected the honour would overwhelm them.

"Come and look round the garden and have a cigarette, Righton," I said, and I led him through the

French windows of the drawing-room on to the lawn beyond.

"Very kind chap, your gov'nor, Martin," said he; "I thought he wanted to lift me out of the phaeton."

Then we talked "Oxford" for a quarter of an hour, when I saw Florence enter the drawing-room and I took him back into the house for a cup of tea.

Righton was struck, as I anticipated, by my sister's beauty, and she went through the introduction with as much coolness as though she had lived in an environment of peers' sons. Florence I knew would hold her own; Florence was certainly good form.

"Do you take milk and sugar?" she asked, as indifferently as though it had been young Brown or any other of our neighbours.

Then we began to talk of theatres, a fairly safe subject to commence with.

"Give me a 'rousing' burlesque," said Righton; "that's what I like."

"You are a capital judge," said I.

Then the artless youth told us all about his favourite actresses. Lottie somebody-or-the-other—I forget her name—he described as "a clipper."

"I went three times last week, Miss Martin," said he, "to see her dance. I did, 'pon my word."

"That is the strongest evidence of her talent," said my sister.

"You mustn't fancy, to hear me go on," said he, "that I'm 'mashed' on her like the other Johnnies. She's off to America soon, and I shouldn't wonder if a lot of them didn't follow her there."

Here Robert entered and was presented to Righton, who received him affably. Robert was a little nervous

and relieved his feelings occasionally by an unnecessary clearance of his throat, till Florence said:

"I am afraid, Robert, you must be sitting in a draught," upon which he took the opportunity of escaping into the garden. As a rule, Bob was perfectly free from shyness. I have known him carry on a conversation of a playfully amorous nature before a crowd of dashing young city men at a luncheon bar, but proximity to a lord filled him with awe. Poor Bob! he never had my advantages. It is in these matters training tells. Florence was different. She pretended she was a radical, and chattered away with Lord Righton with so much ease that when we went up to dress he said to me quite enthusiastically:

"I say, Martin, what 'snap' your sister has got! and how she must 'mash' all your local 'Johnnies'!"

CHAPTER V.

We were a pleasant little family party at dinner. Edith Lyall helped my sister to keep the conversation going. My mother was a little over-anxious, and said twice in the course of the repast that she hoped "the Earl and Countess were well."

"A 1," said the young nobleman.

When the ladies were gone, my father told Lord Righton that he doubted if the Earl, his father, could give him a better glass of claret than that which "you are doing me the honour, my lord, to drink at my table."

"You bet your boots he can't," said Righton. "His tipple's limited in quantity and quality. Why, my mother—she's Low Church and that-sort-o'-thing—is a Bishop's daughter, you know,"—my father nodded reverentially, "she'd pin a bit of blue in my button-hole if I'd let her. 'Look at your father,' she said to me the other day when we were talking about the temp'rance question—she did most of the talking though —'look at your father. Why, his ancestors have been accumulating gout by centuries of intemp'rance.' That," he continued, turning to me, "is the worst of having a genealogical tree to boast of. You always feel it in your toe. Ha! ha! ha!"

And he tossed off a bumper of my father's *La Rose* with the air of a man admiring his own wit.

"Ho! ho! ho! feel it in your toe, capital!" roared Bob, whom wine had warmed into his wonted familiarity and ease.

"Yes, ain't it good?" ejaculated Righton. "But it hasn't reached my toe yet, so, until it does, I'll polish off any man's liquor that's worth drinking."

And when we joined the ladies he had taken more of my father's than was good for him.

Then the carriage came and we started for the dance, Robert being accommodated with a seat on the box. Righton was a little sleepy during the drive, but woke up when we reached the Assembly Rooms.

I had timed our arrival to a nicety. The first valse was just finished, and most of the people had arrived. When we appeared I could detect a slight murmur in the crowd. "Here they are!" it seemed to say. The young ladies began to plume themselves, and everyone, with the exception of the "Queen of Sheba," her husband, her court, and her battered Baronet, moved towards our end of the room. Lord Righton's appearance, I fancy, slightly disappointed them. Outwardly there was not much of the aristocrat about him.

"Great Scott!" said he,—his lordship had made a tour in America and was proud of any tag of New-World slang he could intermingle with his conversation, —"there are some 'clippers' here, Miss Martin, but you and Miss Lyall certainly 'take the cake.'"

Righton had been inscribing his name on their cards, whilst the young ladies of "our set," as yet not introduced, looked on wistfully.

That evening was a social triumph for me. The other cliques were green with jealousy; all the men envied me, and the young ladies longed for introductions to the affable little lord, rotating in rapid *deux temps*

with my sister, who overtopped him by nearly the whole of her graceful head.

Robert was dancing with Edith Lyall, and I stood in the midst of a throng of friends, on some of whom I promised to confer the honour of an introduction to "my friend Righton." As an undertone to the buzz of the crowded room, I could hear the people discussing him.

"He's dancing *deux temps*."

"The Prince always dances *deux temps*."

"He doesn't look up to much."

"He hasn't a silk collar to his coat."

"He doesn't know the 'Queen of Sheba's' Baronet."

"Of course not. The Bart.'s bad form and dropped out of the best sets long ago."

Meanwhile the "Queen of Sheba" danced a majestic *trois temps* with Sir Lucius Chump at her own end of the room, with an air of affected indifference to everything, including our triumph, which I knew was wormwood and gall to her, and of utter oblivion to all moving beyond the immediate circle in which she condescended to revolve. I marked her meeting with Miss Lyall. Two icebergs crossing in polar seas on different currents could not have been more chillily unconscious of each other's presence. Mr. Muirhead-Salter and his small surrounding of his wife's partners looked on at the opposite corner of the room to that which our party had annexed, a little dejected, knowing their Queen had been cut out, and feeling that for that evening, at least, their glory, like hers, had departed. But was I quite happy? I felt my eyes following Edith, as it seemed, against their will. I had only asked her for three dances, which she had graciously given. Discretion bid me take no more, but another feeling,

the opposite to discretion, had inclined me strongly to claim as many as I could. I was inwardly jealous of Robert twirling her round the room, with the flush of pleasure the absurd exercise brought on her cheeks. Her soft gray eyes were gleaming, and her bright brown hair shone with a sort of lustre for me amongst the heads of all the other women, and I watched it moving like a strange beacon. Bah! I was young; she was, I thought, beautiful; and when my turn to dance with her came, and the scent of her hair and the roses she wore—roses which I might have given her!—floated up around me, my heart swung backwards and forwards with a movement all the bumping races, all the consolation cups I had won, could never produce. By this time her card was full. Two young men, minions of Mr. Muirhead-Salter, had actually been tempted to throw off their allegiance, and beg introductions to her.

"Dance with them," Florence had whispered; "they are slaves of the 'Queen of Sheba.'"

The valse with Edith delighted me. Round, round and round we whirled amongst a ripple of revolving heads. Every now and then I saw Righton, twisting, with rough hair and moist, pasty face, still with Florence, who had, I learnt, some difficulty in guiding him, for he was an erratic valser—such as wander from their orbit and dance themselves into a breathless heap on to the spacious laps of chaperones on the red rout seats.

I took Miss Lyall to the refreshment room when the dance was ended.

"I saw you cut Mrs. Salter," said I. "It was nobly done. Now you have captured two squires of her train, your vengeance will be complete."

At the other end of the room was the "pop, pop," of champagne corks. The "Queen," her husband and courtiers were standing round a servant who was filling their glasses.

The other dancers were refreshing themselves with the mildest claret cup, which they quaffed in affected oblivion to the foaming goblets of the clique. The two young men who had been introduced to Miss Lyall stood apart like mutineers who have forfeited their rights.

"Did ever anyone see such execrable taste?" exclaimed Miss Lyall.

"Shocking, isn't it?" said I.

Then Florence and Lord Righton entered the room. My sister joined us, but the sudden popping of a cork attracted her partner's attention, who darted off in the direction of the sound before she could attempt to check him.

Pushing his way through the circle of champagne-drinkers and armed with a glass, "I say, you," he said to the servant, "give me some 'cham-pop' quick, for I'm just parched!"

Mrs. Muirhead-Salter turned so red that all her rouge was quenched, her husband remained speechless with astonishment, their friends smiled, and we all pretended not to see the comic little error.

The servant filled his glass in silence. Heedless of his mistake, Righton tossed it off with an air of satisfaction and then rejoined us.

"I say, Miss Martin," he said to my sister, "jes' let me get you some of that 'cham-pop;' it's capital. That's the stuff to dance on, 'cham-pop' and plenty of it!"

"What have you done?" said Florence in a low voice and with affected dismay. "The champagne you

have been drinking is the private beverage of Mr. and Mrs. Salter. This is a charity dance and we cannot afford to supply champagne. They send theirs because they want to keep up their spirits."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Righton. "Here's a go!"

The situation tickled him and he laughed.

"A most natural mistake to make," said Miss Lyall.

"Shall I apologise?" cried Righton.

"Well, you know best," said I, hoping he would.

"I think it's best let alone," said he, grinning. "I shouldn't know what to say! If I want some more I suppose I shall have to ask for it. But you people do have some rummy customs of your own."

At this reflection Florence laughed very heartily. A few minutes after the whole room knew Lord Righton had drunk Mr. Salter's champagne and everyone was amused. The next day I heard that she had declared her intention of never attending that dance again. The people were so deplorably common, she was reported to have said, and Lord Righton had the manners of a stable-boy.

When we drove home that evening I felt proud of my success. In my usual manner I silently enumerated the advantages it had brought. Righton was struck with my sister's vivacity and beauty. This opened vague possibilities of future triumph on which my imagination loved to dwell. Were Florence's thoughts, I wondered, drifting towards the same goal? Next came the social triumphs on which I have sufficiently dwelt. They bring, it is true, no lasting advantage, but their enjoyment for the time is keen—very keen. As we drove home in the morning dawn, with the scent of distant hay-fields drifting across the placid river

through the carriage windows, and the sound of awakening thrushes in the air, Edith's face and figure gradually loomed through the dusk, solemn and quiet after the fatigue of the dance.

Her dress touched my knees, and I saw she had removed the gloves from her slender fingers. This picture mixed with my more ambitious musings without coalescing with them. "What are you thinking of, Percival Bailey-Martin?" something seemed to say. "Edith Lyall has hardly a penny; and beauty—well—after all you can do without beauty." But, oh! how sweet the hay smelt in the dawn of that summer morning.

"How the thrushes sing!" said Edith Lyall.

"Dissipated little dicky-birds! They've not been to bed," said the young lord, who had no more sentiment in him than a statue of George IV.

"You must not use your satirical gifts so lavishly, Lord Righton," said my sister; "even the early birds can't escape."

"I say, Martin," said he to me, "your sister's been sitting on me all the evening. She says she hopes the House of Lords won't be abolished before I come into the title, 'cos it's a pity such gifts as mine should be wasted. Ho! ho! ho! I ain't an orator, Miss Martin, but not nearly such a silly sort o' snipe as you think."

Florence evidently regarded him as an irresponsible being, and he accepted the ridiculous position quite complacently.

"You don't do yourself justice," she replied. "You are like Falstaff—intellectually only, of course—not only witty yourself but the cause of wit in others. But, O dear, I wish I was in bed!"

We stopped at Miss Lyall's house and I opened the

door with the latch-key she gave me. "Thank you all for a pleasant evening," she said, giving me her hand. "You have all been kind, and I am sorry it is over."

What a soft palm it was!

"And you, Miss Lyall," I said, "have added to my pleasure, and made to-night one I shall always remember."

I seemed to be speaking in spite of myself. Our eyes met for a moment, she gave another smile towards the carriage, and then the door closed behind her.

"Don't be a fool and make soft speeches," said an inward monitor to me—the tutelary deity of the family always ready to prompt me, but who sometimes speaks after the indiscretion it is his duty to prevent has been committed. Yet the warning voice all the same could not prevent me from missing her.

CHAPTER VI.

The first thought that came into my mind when I awoke was of Edith Lyall on her doorstep in the dawn. This thought had, in obedience to the laws of prudence, to be dismissed. The next was of Lord Righton and my sister. She had undoubtedly made an impression on him. How deep this might be I could not tell. Here was an opportunity which ought not to be wasted. Unfortunately I was not sure of Florence. Personally Righton was not an ideal lover. He was short; he was pasty; he had fat round shoulders and no neck. Moreover, at the rate his hair was disappearing from his slanting forehead, premature baldness awaited him. I admit his physical assets as well as his intellectual ones were of no value in the market. But then Righton would be a peer of the realm. With twenty-nine women in the world this would outweigh any physical disadvantage. Only the most foolish school-girls, unconsciously preparing for themselves tedious lives of perpetual maidenhood, run about the world waiting for the impossible young man built on their own ideal lives, who never arrives. Lancelots are not commonly met with in suburban society, yet the most enterprising young women manage to get married all the same. In the nineteenth century it isn't wise to leave all the wooing to the men. Fortunately most girls are aware of this. But as I have said before, quoting my

mother, Florence was peculiar. So far Lord Righton had only succeeded in appealing to her sense of the ludicrous.

When I went down to breakfast, Bob and my father had gone to town and my mother was waiting to pour out my tea—an office which generally enabled us to have a few moments' conversation alone.

"No signs of Righton?" said I.

"None. His man is at present getting his lordship up. I asked if he would like some tea, and his man said his lordship would prefer some brandy and soda water. So that has been sent him. But tell me about the ball, Percival."

"It went off capitally. We 'scored' all along the line. The Muirhead-Salters will both be ill with envy this morning, and Righton danced with Florence nearly all the evening."

"Did he? What an honour for the dear child!"

"Yes, mother. I hope she will appreciate it."

"Appreciate it indeed! why, of course she will. She is no fool. None of my children are, I am thankful to say. If Lord Righton pays her attention she will have sense enough to make the best of it."

"Will she? Well, I hope so. She's a little too fond of taking what she thinks is a comic view of things."

"That *is* Florence's failing. She is the only one of you who makes jokes. They are, I believe, considered good by people who like that sort of thing, but I have my misgivings. I'm sure I can't tell from which side of the family her humour came. Not from mine, I'm sure. We were all very sober people, and your grandfather Bailey was a chapel-goer, and the Martins were all steady sort of people."

But I had no desire to hear of my dissenting ancestors.

"Florence is fond of saying smart things, but men don't care to marry women who can laugh at them," said I, thinking my mother might give Florence a hint. I knew she would outwardly laugh at it, but on which it was possible she might inwardly act.

"Florence would never laugh at any young man who entertained a feeling of regard—I may say affection—towards her. Ah, Percival, if we could see you all comfortably settled, your father and I would be quite happy."

But my sister's arrival on the scene put an end to the conversation.

"Good-morning, mamma, good-morning, Percival. His little lordship not down yet?"

"Lord Righton prefers to breakfast in his room," said my mother, with dignity, as though such a preference were a mark of distinction.

"How amiable of him! He was quite confidential last night, Percival, and told me all about the One Button Club. Such orgies, mamma! But I am under promise of secrecy. 'Don't split on your brother,' quoth his lordship, 'or his gov'ner will stop his allowance,'—he called it ''lowance,' because it was just after dinner. He told me all about your initiatory ceremony too, Percival."

"He was only 'gassing' to amuse you," said I; "you got on capitally."

"Yes," said Florence, "he amused me. Lord Righton put me in mind of Foker in 'Pendennis.' He told me of all his love affairs with the ladies who dance in the ballets. 'Not one of them,' he said, 'was a patch' on me."

"His lordship was making game of my little girl," said mamma. "She mustn't let her little head be turned though."

My mother followed my sister's rapid conventional flights with the most lax attention. It happened generally that before she found time to blame any sentiment Florence was several "laps" on ahead. Her references to John were Greek to my mother and prevented her detecting the flippancy of my sister's tone.

But there was a shuffling step at the door, and Righton made his appearance in a check suit of some splendour.

"Great Scott!" said he, "Miss Florence, you look as fresh as paint. Ha! ha! ha! It wouldn't do to tell all the girls that; they would take it as a personal insult. How de do, Mrs. Martin. How are you, Martin?"

"My dear Lord Righton," said my mother, "won't you have some breakfast?"

"No more breakfast, thanks," said he, "my man brought me up all I want; ain't much of a hand at breakfast. Hope I sha'n't put you off your feed, Miss Martin?"

"Not in the least," said Florence, "I'm not a horse."

"I say, Martin," said he turning to me, "that was 'one' for me, eh?"

My mother smiled kindly the while, apparently pleased with the manners of the aristocracy. "You'll stay the day with us, Righton?" said I.

"I'm afraid," said he; "I've an engagement to dine."

He looked towards my sister as though waiting for her to express a wish on the subject.

"Do stay, Lord Righton," said my mother, "it is a treat to have you."

"You never mind breaking an engagement," said I. "Drop this one, and spend a quiet evening with us. I'll drive you up to-morrow after breakfast."

"If you do, you will find it very dull after the Celibate Club," said Florence.

"Even that ain't all fireworks," said he, a little sullenly. "Thank ye, Mrs. Martin, I don't think I ought to chuck up an engagement even for the pleasure of making Miss Martin laugh at me."

"You are too kind, Lord Righton, you are indeed," said my mother, effusively, although her words had some vagueness of application.

"But what are you going to do this morning, Miss Martin?" Righton asked, turning to my sister, who only raised her eyebrows at his last remark.

"I am going to Kingston market to buy some flowers," she answered.

"A capital idea," interposed I. "We'll come too. It's rather an amusing sight, Righton. Quite continental. The whole place turns out there about half-past twelve. Put on your hat, Florence."

I took Righton into the garden, and gave him a cigarette and as much flattery as I could "rub in" to restore his good temper. I candidly believe he was astonished that my sister did not fall in love with him off-hand. "I don't know what you find," he once had said to me, "but I can never talk to a girl for five minutes without 'mashing' her."

Now, here was one upon whom his attractions had no visible effect and it made him pensive. I saw, however, that my sister could not have chosen a better means of leading him on.

People, I believe, come from a distance to see Kingston market, and when the sun shines the sight is

picturesque. The "blazers" of the boating men lend it variety and colour. Then it affords people such an excellent chance of cutting one another that it is sure to be popular.

To march Lord Righton through the throng of Surbitonians was to add to the triumph of the previous evening. There was Mrs. Muirhead-Salter sitting haughtily in her victoria with the C. springs, exchanging greetings with her friends, supercilious stares with her enemies, lavishly purchasing the best flowers with a "blow-the-expense" sort of air. She pretended she did not see us.

"He! he! he!" sniggered Righton, "I drank her champagne last night."

We were all laughing at the recollection of this incident when we passed her. Then we stopped before the flower stall, where Righton bought Florence the biggest bouquet of roses he could procure. If you want to please Florence, you need only give her a bunch of roses. The smell and colour always seem to exhilarate her. In a few minutes, she was in the highest spirits. I dropped behind to speak to an Oxford man who happened to turn up. Whilst pretending to listen to his prosings about the 'Varsity match and the new "Blues," I watched Righton and my sister moving from stall to stall, and I could see that every remark she made increased his amusement. Strange! I confess I never found Florence's society diverting, but its effect on Righton was surprising. There were several members of the Celibate Club who prided themselves on the possession of wit, but their most carefully prepared funny stories often evoke nothing from Righton but a "dessay, it's very funny if you could only see it." But Florence made him laugh with

so much spontaneity and vigour, that people looked round to see who it was.

Market places have always been famous for unexpected meetings. For suddenly we came face to face with Lambert, who had been to school with Righton and myself at old Bland's. He was a year or two my senior, had passed through Sandhurst into the army, and gone out to India with his regiment. I had seen him several times in London. He looked very brown, stalwart and soldierly now.

"What! Bailey-Martin, how you have grown to be sure, as the nurses say. And you, Righton, too, under his respectable wing. It's quite like old times."

Then seeing for the first time that a lady was with us—my sister having stayed to speak to a stall-keeper—he apologised.

I introduced him to Florence, and then we all turned to walk back. I managed that Florence and Righton should pair off together, Lambert and I following.

At any other time, I should have been pleased to see Arthur Lambert. The Lamberts are a good family. Unfortunately old General Lambert, the father, had little more than his pension, and his son, I should fancy, a very trifling allowance beyond his pay. Just now he was in the way. No one could fail to observe that Lord Righton appeared a very sorry shambler, when he was next to a young soldier six feet high, as straight as a dart, and bronzed by three years of an Indian sun. Florence was fond of making comparisons, and this one must have struck her. Women never take men as they are—at least the cleverer ones do not—but arrive at their conclusions by a silent process of comparison. Perhaps, this is why so few of them are perfectly satisfied with those husbands to whom

accident has allied them, and enter promptly on the task of trying to make the "best of them." This is not quite the idea of life taught us by sentimental novels where ladies come across the ideal man with tedious certainty, but experience has taught me it is pretty true.

Whilst we were walking home, I observed Florence had ceased to amuse Righton, and had grown thoughtful; meanwhile, I was uncertain whether I should invite Lambert to lunch. He had called that morning, he told me, at the barracks at Hampton Court, where a friend was stationed, but had missed him for some reason which he explained but I forget.

"Quite delightful to see you here on your native heath, Bailey-Martin," he said, in his good-natured bantering way that had so often irritated me at school. "I was wondering what I should do, and now I have the advantage of your instructive conversation."

Lambert's tone decided me. There was nothing to be gained by inviting him to lunch. He might, it is true, introduce me to his friend in the Lancers, which might lead to something, but I was convinced he would be in the way and annoy Lord Righton by chaffing him—for Lambert was no respecter of persons.

I was unfortunately debarred from snubbing him, as his impertinence deserved, by my mother, whose perspicuity is not so keen as she and my father believe. We ran against her on the parade, where she takes moderate pedestrian exercise for an hour daily.

Righton and Florence were a few yards ahead, and the latter had evidently informed her mother who Lambert was, for she at once introduced herself.

"I have," she said, "heard my boy speak of you, Mr. Lambert, and I hope you will come and lunch with us."

Alas, for the mistakes committed by some people who deem their worldly wisdom infallible! How fatuous a thing it is for a woman who has a pretty daughter to invite a penniless handsome soldier to the house! Yet my poor mother blundered into this with a placid self-satisfaction that almost makes me swear when I recall it.

Lambert accepted the invitation with alacrity.

"I am always," she added, "so delighted to see any of my son's friends."

CHAPTER VII.

Lord Righton sat next to my sister at lunch, and at first my mother monopolised Lambert's attention with an interesting account of my health when a child, which he heard with an air of becoming gravity and interest. I had been, he remembered, always delicate as a boy, and he had persuaded me, as I no doubt remembered, to try cod-liver oil. "In fact, I believe," he said, "Percival took it regularly when he visited Lord Righton."

But my mother had never heard of the incident.

"She never gave it to her children," she informed him, because she did not "hold with it." Beyond an occasional tonic and perhaps a dose of magnesia in the spring, we had never had much medicine."

Poor mother! she never knew how great a strain she used to put on my patience. The difficulties in such a family as ours—and I think our case is typical amongst the well-to-do middle classes—is for parents and children to perceive that the two planes in which they move are not identical. I discovered their difference when I was twelve years old, but here was my mother on the verge of sixty totally unconscious of it, and discussing the medicine of my youth with a fatuous young nobleman and a satirical soldier.

"Your children, Mrs. Martin," said Lambert, "do you credit."

But Florence shut him up.

"I am glad," she said, "to find we meet with your approval."

"He! he! he!" sniggered Righton; "Lambert fancies he's inspecting you both, and he will want to see your kits d'rectly."

But Lambert took Florence's snubbing with great good humour. He seemed rather to enjoy it.

"That's right," he said, "you knocked me down very neatly, and then Righton jumped on me. I deserve my punishment."

"Lambert was an awful fellow at school, you know, Miss Martin," said Righton, "and was always pulling a chap's leg; I'll bet my bottom dollar he won't try it on with you again."

Righton's slang metaphor was unfortunate in its application; and the idea occurred to him; for, seeing Lambert's eyebrows raised, he added,—

"I beg your pardon, Miss Martin, but you'll guess what I mean."

"Perfectly," said she, "you mean that Mr. Lambert is a satirist who likes employing his valuable gifts."

"Hallo, Lambert," said Righton, turning to him maliciously, "you see Miss Martin's taken your measure."

"I am afraid so," he answered, smiling.

To my great annoyance, after this little passage of arms Lambert commenced to make himself interesting. The conversation turned on India, and Florence, whose curiosity is great where ignorance in a fashionable woman is no disadvantage, commenced to draw him out with her usual skill. Lambert had seen a good deal of soldiering for his years. He had served in Burmah; he had served in a campaign against some Hill Tribe, of

whose existence I had never heard; he had been stationed at Peshawur and made an excursion into Afghanistan. He had accompanied a Lieutenant-Governor on a shooting expedition into the Terai, and had contributed an article entitled "Proposed organization of the Independent Native Forces," to that leading Review "The Sky Rocket."

I do not think he had any desire to monopolize the conversation at lunch, but Florence took care the principal part of it should fall to his share. Lord Righton, with his feeble chatter about the last song and dance at the Hilarity, and the latest gossip from the Celibate Club, was obviously at a disadvantage.

The devil was in it! Why on earth did my mother insist on inviting this fellow to lunch. Here was Righton looking bored! To get a swell of his calibre to stop with you and to find him looking bored because your sister forgets to amuse him is a terrible waste of an opportunity. Directly lunch was over I hurried off both men to smoke in the garden, in order to put an end to Lambert's innings at the luncheon-table.

"Lambert thinks himself a devilish fascinating Johnnie," muttered Righton to me, "because he's been bullying a lot o' bloomin' niggers."

"So he does," said I. "How he bored poor Florence."

"Did he though?" said he; "then she concealed her feelings better than I can." Righton was jealous. I should have been glad of this result under other circumstances, but Florence had done her best to be agreeable to Lambert with no "ulterior motive," as the Law-court reporters say. If she had tried this game on as a piece of feminine diplomacy I should have recognized in her an ally in the conquest of Righton.

Unfortunately, I could see she was indifferent whether he were pleased or vexed. Lambert went soon after lunch, but my mother, seconded by my sister, pressed him to call again.

With some difficulty I induced Righton to stay another night with us, but it was not a success. My father bored him at dinner under the impression he was making himself agreeable. Bob won a couple of pounds from him at pyramids, a game at which the former "fancies" his play and at which the latter excels, and Florence informed him she considered Lambert the most interesting man she had met for a long time.

This to Righton! who cannot endure to hear a pretty woman praise any other man but himself.

I was much vexed of course. I asked Bob, privately, what he meant by beating Righton at pyramids.

"On my word, Percival," said he, quite crestfallen, "I couldn't help it; he couldn't put a ball in. I wouldn't 'rook' him for the world."

I was too cross to argue with Bob, whom I had never seen playing better, so I only told him I wished for the future he would confine his skill to his own friends and not try it on mine in his father's house.

But he lit his pipe and said he would take care he did not, if they were all so "shirty" over a trifling matter of "two quid"!

Bob always took a mercenary view of things and was quite unable to see that Righton's annoyance was caused by his defeat before my sister, not for the loss of his money.

When Righton left next morning, however, he was amiable enough, and told my mother he hoped to look us up again.

On my return from the station, where I had accompanied Righton, I found Florence reading a magazine in the garden.

"So you've seen your little friend safely off," said she.

"I wouldn't laugh at him," I replied, "if I were you, since he does you the honour to admire you."

"That is indeed an honour! Lord Righton's taste in such matters is so catholic. There is no prejudice about him. He admires—let me see, who doesn't he admire? There is Baby Hilton, who dances at the Hilarity. She is a 'clipper.' Tossie de Vere, who performs at the Universe, is as smart as they make 'em; there are the sisters Spicer, who do the 'patter business' at the Octagon, and several others whose names I forget, but who are equally well known to fame. Now you tell me I am added to the long and respectable list, and I am flattered."

"He doesn't really admire any of these women," I said, "he only pretends to because it's the fashion in his set. Look here, Florence! Most girls in your position would be only too proud if Lord Righton looked at them, and wouldn't sit down and compare him with a pompous, hectoring fellow like Lambert, just because he's a bit slangy."

I saw I had nettled Florence.

"Mr. Lambert is neither pompous nor hectoring," she answered. "He is the least affected amongst your acquaintances. Perhaps that is why you misunderstand him."

Then glancing at the magazine in her hand I recognised the brilliant cover of the "Sky Rocket."

"I see," said I, "he has sent you his article. But I shouldn't advise you to get too thick with Lambert.

He hasn't a penny piece, and has no intention of marrying unless he can pick up a fortune. I've often heard him say so. In fact he's a first-class 'detrimental.' So look out."

"Thank you, Percival; I will consider myself warned," she said. "I shall know how to behave next time."

"Don't talk nonsense, Florence," I said; "I know the world better than you do. Don't throw your chances away, that's all. There are a good many in your favour, as you know. But it struck me you were not inclined to make the best of them."

"You put the subject in your usual lucid and refined manner, Percival, and with a worldly wisdom beyond your years."

It was no good; she was laughing at me. My advice was wasted.

Florence has many gifts; but common-sense, which ought to regulate social life, was not amongst them.

CHAPTER VIII.

Florence had lost her chance of Lord Righton for the present. If she had wished it, I am sure he would have always been down at Surbiton; but either through indifference or on purpose she let him slip.

At Surbiton Lord Righton was looked upon as the intimate friend of the Bailey-Martins.

I have laid some stress on this period because it shows the first serious efforts on my part for the social advancement of my family.

It was also at this time that my own character was destined to be seriously tried.

Edith Lyall was an almost daily temptation to me, and the gossips of course were busy. That summer is identified by her presence, and stands out radiant and bright above all others. I cannot exactly tell whether or not I was in love with Edith. "To be in love" is a phrase of vague import, ill adapted to define the sentiments of a practical man in his relations with women. But it is here my intention to set down the absolute truth. I can't say whether I was in love with Edith or not, because if I attach to the words the meaning attributed to them by sentimental people, I find I was not ready to sacrifice for her sake all those worldly aspirations and ambitions that have been the motives of my life.

I confess that I would have asked Edith to share my future if she had been rich. Then there would have been no risks; but having no taste for a narrow life in genteel poverty amongst suburban society, I heroically refused to give the reins to my affections.

Looking back I recall, not without regret, that brief period of discontented delight that has never been repeated. That I chose the wiser path, I think my readers will allow.

It will be perceived that I take it for granted Edith desired to marry me. I do. She had little power of concealing her feelings; moreover, she was romantic and susceptible. I adapted myself to suit her character and moods with skill, and, I hope, with an unaffected sympathy, that upon my honour I believe was half-unconscious. We entered on that dangerous but alluring ground, which one can traverse only when the feelings and affections retain their earliest edge, with different intentions. Perfectly happy in the enjoyment of the present, Edith probably believed I was obeying the same impulse, and following it no matter where it should lead me. But this was not so. I was determined to be carried only so far as it suited my convenience and purpose. When people actuated by motives so divergent as ours meet, as we did, misunderstandings arise, and much pretty poetry is scattered in the prosaic dust of common-sense. Edith was ready to give everything ungrudgingly. Unfortunately, I could not afford to be so generous. But my nature was too delicate and tender to permit me to indulge my love of truth at the expense of her feelings, and, as her society afforded me greater pleasure than that of any girl I had met, I did not feel called upon to deprive myself of a delight as keen as it was innocent and new.

I trust I have made myself clear. I desire to extenuate nothing.

It was at a Surbiton musical evening that the very mild flirtation between us assumed a more serious character. The musical taste in most London suburbs is widely spread, but does not go very deep. Mothers complain their daughters do not learn more "taking" music. But the young men lean entirely to the side of the popular taste, and sing drawing-room ballads with more vigour than art.

At Surbiton we were original. Ballads do not require genius. Perhaps this is why the world is so prolific in the production of fifth-rate songsters. Edith sang, but I am thankful she avoided commonplace and foolish songs. I am no judge of music, but I can see the comic side of it. It may be because I have no taste for poetry, that something in most ballads appeals to my risible faculties. I can listen to them with funereal gravity, but all the while secret caverns of my mind are reverberating with silent laughter. This power of inner mirth is a compensation for prolonged boredom to those who possess it. On the other hand, I am unable to burst into a spontaneous peal of laughter like my sister Florence. The sense of humour granted to me is not on the surface, but concealed in the recesses of my nature, and unsuspected by those who know me best.

But to return to my ballads. I did not discover how simple such forms of musical diversion were until I found there was a local production of them. Home-made jams and confectionery may be good, but home-made poetry and songs are not up to the level of the kind produced by people who receive some sort of wages for their wares. Still the local producers are not with-

out honour in their own neighbourhood, although it is impossible, of course, to ascertain how much of this sort of adulation is genuine.

Have you ever noticed the admiration entertained in provincial centres, by not a few women, for some local preacher of limited eloquence, or for a medical man of dubious science? The audience, to whom most unknown celebrities of this kind appeal, is generally composed of women. We all know enthusiasts who decorate churches, or attend ambulance lectures for some other reason than the mere desire of unnecessary employment. These sort of people may fall under the fascinations of the local ballad-monger as easily as under the spell of the local preacher. One of our young gentlemen composed a ballad, and it was considered a great treat to hear him sing it. Florence and I were invited on the evening of its introduction to the world, and Edith Lyall accompanied us. The performance took place at one of "the best" houses, where Mrs. Temple, one of our leading ladies dwelt.

As we drove there, I remember Florence and Edith were laughing in anticipation.

The charm which Edith had for me had grown steadily. It was a pleasure to sit by her, a pleasure to hear her voice. I fancy at this time my manner was gentler than was natural to me. Everyone makes his little excursion into Arcadia—that land flowing abundantly with all sweet things, but where common-sense refuses to flourish.

It was a beautiful summer night. The long twilight was lingering about the west like a luminous shadow. Over the tall tree-tops in Bushy Park the stars were beginning to glimmer, reflected here and there in the placid surface of the river. Some human sentiments

are a stimulus to human perceptions. The sombre foliage of the trees, the placid river, the serene sky, the crepuscular tenderness of a summer night, are soothing to everybody. But so are cigarettes. There must be a romantic element even in me. It found a niche to lodge in that evening. No one in mental health is quite blind to what, I believe, people call the poetry of things. The sentiment which Edith inspired me with, added a new enjoyment to the commonplace scenes through which I had hitherto moved, half-unconscious of their existence. I felt a new luxury in living, and owed it to Edith Lyall. In such moods as these a man scarcely weighs his words or actions. Is he entirely responsible for them?

When we arrived we found a number of people assembled in the drawing-room, awaiting the event of the evening; others were wandering through the garden, where a few Chinese lanterns glimmered amongst the branches of the trees. This arrangement suggested to Florence "a shilling tea" at a London exhibition.

Mrs. Temple received us warmly. Her cue is to admire everybody and everybody's relations. She does not do this behind one's back. *Her* admiration is not wasted.

"How lovely Florence is looking to-night," she said, in a burst of enthusiasm, to me. "Are you not proud of your sister? And Miss Lyall too, what a beautiful pair they make!"

Mr. Temple stood behind his handsome wife without echoing her enthusiasm.

"How d'yer do?" said he. He is one of those gentlemen who shine more in business than in society, for which his manners and his habits hardly suit him.

But his wife has all the social qualities, and her entertainments are on a magnificent scale.

"That was a nice little deal of your father's in nitrates the other day, Martin," said he.

"Capital," I replied. "So glad, dear Mrs. Temple, you think Florence looking nice. We are all longing to hear the new song; I'm sure it will be lovely."

"First rate," said Mr. Temple, "for Briggs is one of those chaps who understands his business. My dear," he continued, turning to his wife, "who is that young man over there with the moustache. He hasn't said how do you do to me. Doesn't he know who I am?"

Glancing in the direction in which he looked I saw Lambert.

"That is Mr. Lambert," she said; "Captain Melton brought him."

"I shall go and speak to him," said Mr. Temple, bustling off, "for he ought to have found out who I was."

Mr. Temple always insisted on his rights. By this time there was an imposing collection of stiff-backed and pompous Surbitonians assembled, trying to unstiffen their rigid manners. In this there was some difficulty, because Mrs. Temple prided herself on her house being the only one where the different cliques could meet without danger. In this occasionally she was disappointed, for the fire of envy, hatred and malice sometimes shot up above the surface. She glided round the room paying compliments in set phrases. "How charming so and so looks, an ornament to the room." So and so being somebody's wife, daughter or *fiancée*. This is a simple way of gaining popularity.

Lambert, who had escaped from his host, was now talking to my sister and Edith. I joined the group.

The tinkling of the piano made us separate in search of seats.

"Come into the drawing-room. I wouldn't miss the new song for anything," said Florence. She hurried off, followed by Lambert, and I was left with Edith. There was a hushed silence. The piano, under the touch of Mrs. Briggs, emitted a few hackneyed open chords, in which the bass notes concealed the weak tinkle of the treble, where glimmered the ghost of more airs than one.

It was coming! it was coming! and it came. The voice of the singer burst forth in this song never heard by audience before.

I am not a musical critic, so I give the first verse so that the reader may appreciate its simple beauty:

"Had I met thee in thy beauty,
When my heart and hand were free,
When no other claimed the duty
That my soul would yield to thee.
Had I wooed thee!
Had I won thee!
Oh, how glad would be my fate!
Oh! 't were madness to have left thee,
To have known thee but too late."

I could never understand these words myself, but this may not detract from their deep meaning. The composer sung them with a voice trembling with emotion, and the open chords of the accompaniment conveyed, by the sympathy of their prolonged touch, a pathetic impression of a soul in lingering pain.

Friends crowded round the singer and composer to congratulate him.

"If you really like my little trifle so much, I will send you a copy when they are printed," was his reply.

"The price is half a crown. For private circulation only. You will understand. One doesn't like one's little things to become too common."

Soon we were launched on the delights of a musical evening. Some of the more daring spirits escaped to the billiard-room. On the pretence of taking Edith for some refreshments, I led her into the cool garden.

From the drawing-room came a sound of music and the murmur of conversation on which it seemed to float.

"How big the stars are," said Edith, looking through the dark boughs. She spoke a little nervously, and merely to break the silence.

"I don't think anyone saw us come out here," said I, as we passed under the dark and fragrant shadow of a cedar tree.

The words escaped me unconsciously. I had smuggled Edith out by a well-timed manœuvre. Mrs. Temple I knew would "congratulate us" on the slightest excuse.

"What if they did?" asked Edith, in surprise.

"O nothing," I replied; "but Mephistopheles says, 'the world is so censorious!'"

But how quiet the night was! A bird, a nightingale was singing in the distance. The wind just rustled the boughs. There must have been something dangerous in the air. My senses yielded to the "intoxication of the summer's night," as the lady novelists say. We had been gliding down hill with heedless recklessness.

But I am not a lady novelist and lack skill. I can't remember what I said, nor describe a love scene.

Besides, would it be fair to Edith to disclose what must remain a secret between ourselves? Never did

an innocent woman jump to a false conclusion so wildly. My caresses, my words, my manner and her romantic disposition induced her to believe my expressions of affection equivalent to an offer of marriage.

"Ah, Percival," said she with tears in her eyes, "you are very good and kind. I have so little to offer you in return."

But what had I offered? Nothing at all. How perverse the girl was! I had merely assured her of my love and my affection. Was it my fault that she came to the conclusion that I wanted her to marry me, but that for the strongest possible reasons the engagement must be hidden from everybody? Of the sincerity of her love there could be no doubt. My natural good feeling and dislike to inflict pain prevented me from telling her she attached a meaning to my words and acts they were not intended to convey. I merely meant to indulge in the luxury of a flirtation, but apparently from excess of delicacy, did not make my meaning clear.

"But must not I tell Florence?" she asked.

"Certainly not," said I, "it would be ruination. My dear child, you must be guided by me. Surely I know what is best for us both?"

But there are moments which, even in an autobiography, ought to be kept secret. The delicious quarter of an hour we spent in the garden is amongst the number. We reached the drawing-room undetected.

"Be calm, my dear child, be calm!" I said.

I was annoyed to find Florence and Lambert still absorbed in their conversation, on the same seat they had occupied when the ballad was sung, for I knew the insincerity of men in these matters. When Florence was called away to play in her turn, I took care

Lambert should have no opportunity of talking to her alone again, by declaring the carriage was waiting to take us home.

The Temples urged us not to go.

"So sorry, dear Mrs. Temple, but I make it a rule not to keep the horses waiting. I am very punctilious in such things."

"Your brother's discretion is beyond his years!" said Lambert to Florence, as he saw us off.

We put down Edith at her door.

"When shall I see you again?" whispered she, as we stood on the steps.

"I daren't fix a time yet, darling," I said.

I lay awake convinced that night I had made a mistake, but it was one giving me such pleasure I would not correct it yet.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAN who has to make his way in the world has something else to think about than love-making, although that need not be neglected. It has often occurred to me, and probably to a great many others too, that a significance is attached to the relations of the sexes, entirely out of proportion to its importance. Fiction is based on little else in England and France. But if one looks to the men who have made history, it will be generally found that love, as pourtrayed in poetry and three-volume novels, has exercised only an inappreciable influence on their career. To my mind there is only one excuse for marriage on the part of a man. If he can improve his own position by marriage, socially or materially, let him take a wife by all means. But I can see no sentimental excuse for it. To fall a victim to the fascination of a pretty penniless girl is an exhibition of feebleness that in my opinion admits of no palliation. This conviction alone saved me from Edith Lyall. But to be adored and only to return the feeling in moderation is a luxury I was not strong enough to forego.

Edith was her own mistress. Her mother never interfered with her movements. There was no obstacle to our flirtation but the necessity on my part of escaping from too close an entanglement. But it is unnecessary as well as unfair to the lady to disclose the love

passages between us. They were of a very tender nature.

To return to my story.

I was called to the Bar in November, and took chambers in the Temple, which my father furnished for me from the "Oloptic," where he obtained the goods at something below cost price. If my allowance had been larger, I might have now been content to vegetate and become an ordinary man about town, a lounger at clubs, a dawdler in Pall Mall and Piccadilly. As it was, I felt I was meant for something better.

One day when I was installed in my new chambers, soon after I was "called," my father visited me.

I pulled the arm-chair before the fire and sat down to listen. A man of business, even when he happens to be your father, does not come to see one before lunch-time, unless he have something important to say.

"What do you give for your coals, sir?" he asked, frowning at the fire.

"Twenty-five shillings a ton," I replied.

"The deuce you do. It's more than they're worth."

"Well, they came from the Oloptic."

"Then your servant's been changing 'em," said he, crossly. "But I didn't come here to talk about coals. Look here, Percival, what's all this nonsense I hear about you and Miss Lyall?"

The devil! thought I; those Surbiton people have been one too many even for me.

"Well, sir," said I, "that depends very much on what you have heard about us. As there is nothing between us worth talking about, I presume some of our dear friends have been telling you lies."

"I was told you were engaged to be married to Edith Lyall."

I gave a prolonged whistle of affective astonishment.

"I hope you denied the report?"

"Denied it," he retorted, angrily; "I said it must be damned nonsense. To marry in your position indeed, and without a penny-piece of your own! Yes, I did deny it, but I've noticed you've been very thick with the girl, and how could I tell what mischief you had been up to."

"May I ask who told you?"

"Young Brown told me. We came up to Waterloo in the same carriage. 'I hear,' he said, 'I am to congratulate Percival.' 'On what?' asked I, thinking he was referring to you're being 'called.' 'On his engagement to Miss Lyall,' said he. We were stopping at Vauxhall at the time and the whole carriage heard what he said. 'It's the first I've heard of it and it's not true,' I said, 'Percival wouldn't dare to talk about marrying without my consent.' 'I thought you knew all about it,' said he, grinning, 'for all Surbiton's talking about it. Birch, of Austin Birch, proposed to her last Saturday and she refused him. Report says it was because she's engaged to your son.' Temple was sitting in the other corner. 'We all thought it was a case between the young people, Martin,' said he. 'But after your assurance I s'pose there's nothing beyond the common or garden flirtation, a style of going on commoner than when you and I were boys. But I must say if Miss Lyall ain't engaged to Percival he has been carrying on pretty well!' That's what Temple said," continued my father, scowling at me, "and let me tell you, sir, it's a d——d unpleasant thing for a father to hear."

I perceived that to brazen it out was the best course.

"I'm sorry you've been annoyed with these silly

stories about Miss Lyall," I replied, coolly, "especially as it must be unpleasant for the young lady if she ever heard of them. There is absolutely no truth in all this scandal. Miss Lyall is a pretty and amiable girl, but I've no more intention of asking her to marry me than of proposing to my laundress."

"Then what do you mean by carrying on with her?"

I had no idea how much he knew, for my father is not a man to show all of his cards at once.

"Carrying on," I replied, with a slight air of indignation, "I don't exactly know to what you refer."

"Well, I will tell you," retorted he. "Mrs. Saunders, your bed-maker, as you call her, tells me Miss Lyall came here with you to tea last Monday, alone, mind you, alone."

This was unexpected.

"It is true she did. I met Miss Lyall by accident in Bond Street; it appears she had come up to do some shopping, so of course I gave her some tea. It's quite usual. And as to being alone, why, sir, you are in error. I invited Simpson, a relation of the Bishop of London; he's the man opposite on my landing; you can ask him yourself, sir. Simpson and his sister, who happened to be staying with him, a fair girl with dark eyebrows. I think you've met her, and they came round, and 'pon my word I can't see anything in it."

"Why didn't you ask the Bishop of London, too, while you were about it?" said my father, grimly. "Look here, Percival, I don't believe a word of it. You have been making a fool of the girl. She is your sister's friend, and I call it a—a—a—a very dishonourable action, sir, and it must stop."

"Well," I exclaimed, in desperation, jumping up and standing on the hearth-rug, "if this young lady is fond

of me I cannot help it. I've done nothing to win her affections. I am placed, as you must see, in a position which, for a modest man and a gentleman, is exceedingly difficult; I throw myself on your mercy."

At this a loud knock came at the door.

"Come in," I shouted. Lord Righton entered. I was saved. Here was the god from a machine!

"Ah, Righton," I exclaimed, "I am glad you've come. You shall arbitrate between us. Here is my father highly indignant with me because a certain young lady has been to tea in my chambers. The lady, whose name I will not mention, is foolish enough to cherish a weakness for me, and in consequence of this my father is ready to cut me off with a shilling."

"Oh, I say, come, Mr. Martin," said Righton, "don't you be hard on Percival just because women jump at his head. He's a doosid fascinating chap, is your son, but as honourable as they make 'em. Ask my sister Lady Gertrude. 'Mr Bailey-Martin,' she said to me, 'is the only sensible young man of all your college friends.'"

I had no doubt Lady Gertrude had said this, for I had seen a good deal of her of late and made myself useful in her numerous and fatiguing fads.

Righton easily talked my father round. His arguments were neither original nor convincing, but they carried with them all the weight of his station.

"It's very kind of you, my lord," said he, "to take Percival's part. You know how far a man can go in these matters. As you say, young men will be young men; well we won't say any more about it."

I accompanied my father downstairs, leaving my advocate in my rooms with a cigar and the whiskey bottle.

"You understand, Percival," he said, "that I'll stand no nonsense. Don't you fancy you can behave like Lord Righton. Right's right, and wrong's wrong, and his line of country isn't yours. Your mother and myself have always been strict people, and we won't stand anything not straight."

"I quite appreciate your moral standard," said I, "and assure you once more there is nothing between Miss Lyall and myself more than a trifling flirtation, which shall not be continued. I hope you will say nothing about this to my mother or to Florence."

"That's for me to decide," said he, as we went into the Strand, and having hailed a hansom, drove city-wards.

I was relieved to see the last of him. This visit upset me much. I am of an affectionate nature, and it would have given me pain to break with Edith all at once. Besides, I was not really tired of her yet; I felt I could come to no decision. It is well to leave these things to Providence. I decided hastily to keep away from Surbiton for a time and to see what would turn up. Meanwhile Edith must take her chance, and if we met by accident, why, it wasn't my fault.

"O, you gay dog," said Righton, when I came back. "I'm ashamed of you. Such a respectable father as you've got, too. Who is the lady?"

I was too cautious to tell him.

"Nobody in particular," said I, "only my governor has old-fashioned notions about these matters."

"And you've new-fashioned ones about 'em, eh, Martin. I know you! You've a wheedling way with the sex, Master Percival. Well, I suppose you've been kissing the housemaid, and mamma doesn't like it."

But I would not tell Righton whom I had been kissing,

and after undergoing a good deal of clumsy banter, he informed me of the reason of his visit.

Righton was extravagant, and, for a man of his position, his means were small. He had even tried to borrow money of me, but I assured him I was in difficulties myself. Lord Righton's father was a peppery old peer of parsimonious habits, except when his own vices were concerned.

His agents were almost obliged to go down on their knees to induce him to sign a cheque. His habit of swearing at them was attributed to the influence of the Countess's Calvinism.

Righton rather dreaded his father. The last time he had spoken of his want of money, the latter had consigned his eyes to Hades, and had assured Righton that he had other uses for his money than squandering it on his successor. The world gave a pretty shrewd guess where some of his money went, and it was rumoured the Countess was aware of it too, and that she only submitted to her wrongs as a matter of expediency. But it is not for me to chronicle scandals concerning the great families, at whose tables I have broken bread. But all who read the society papers are aware that the domestic life of Lord and Lady Marlington was far from happy. Painful scenes often occurred. Lady Gertrude refused to live at home, and her mother went for consolation to her spiritual adviser, who preached a depressing doctrine in an ugly church at West Brompton, and who had received the living from the late Bishop, her father.

"Martin," said Righton, "I want to borrow £1,000."

"I only wish I had it to lend," said I, "but why don't you go to your father?"

"Not again, thank you. I can't ask my mother, who's sort of excommunicated me. What she has goes to

Timbuctoo with the missionaries. I'm stoney broke, and if I can't get some 'ouff,' I shall be in a pretty tight fix! Dammit! I lost a couple o' hundred quid at Sandowne last meeting, and that's only an item."

Lady Gertrude had a fortune of her own, inherited from the Bishop, her grandfather, who had quarrelled both with his son-in-law, and with his daughter, and taken the usual post-mortem revenge. She was said to be twenty-nine years of age, and lived by herself in South Kensington. Her mother and she rarely met because of her daughter's agnostic views; with her father she was not on speaking terms. Lady Gertrude had taken it on herself to ask him sternly whether there was any truth in the reports concerning himself and a young lady who stood in the front row of the dancers at the Universe, where she marked time with some uncertainty, covered with diamonds, which her modest salary of £1 a week would hardly have purchased, if she had studied the strictest economy, which she did not. She also owned a smart brougham which conveyed her every night to her home in the North-Western district of London. But Lady Gertrude's interference only provoked an explosion of wrath. "It's bad enough to be preached at by my wife," said the peer, "but I'll not stand it from my daughter. Why don't you get married? But men don't marry shrews. They are not such fools! Your mother's a paragon of virtue, and you're a shrew and frighten all the men away."

Righton is my authority for this story.

"They went it hammer and tongs," he said, "and the shindy ended in Gertrude's leaving Eaton Square with her baggage and her maid for a west-end hotel."

The Earl never asked her to return, and as the free-

dom of action suited her better than the unhappy household in Eaton Square, or Righton Hall, she took a house for herself, and boldly running up the flag of independence, sailed under her own colours.

"Ask Lady Gertrude for the money," said I.

"Gertrude's liberal enough when it suits her book. I don't suit it, yer see, Martin. She's taken up with a lot of Johnnies who preach socialism, or some such rot, at the east-end. But let's go over and see her. You've been writing some of your humbug to her and mashing her; I believe you're a convert. Suppose you come, too, and back me up."

This was a chance not to be neglected. I felt I was cut out for a diplomatist, and left my chambers with Righton with so soothing a feeling of complacency that my interview with my father was almost forgotten.

CHAPTER X.

Lady Gertrude took considerable interest in me because she thought she had converted me to her own peculiar form of agnosticism. I cannot remember how it differed from other systems of belief, but when she first explained them,—differentiated them, was her phrase,—I think I appreciated the niceties. Some time before, seeing an article in "The Trumpet" bearing her name, I took the liberty of writing to her to tell her how much I had been impressed by it, and requested her to explain certain points in her argument of an abstruse nature.

"You must not imagine," I wrote in conclusion, "that I am entirely given over to frivolous pursuits. It is not so. I have been brought up unfortunately in a circle which despises philosophy and culture, and even when I was at college I fell into a set that placed no value on intellectual progress, and whose ideas were entirely narrow and conventional. My creed no longer satisfies me. I have become like a ship without a rudder, and ignorance is seated at the helm."

My letter was a dignified request to Lady Gertrude to put her cultured hand on the tiller of my intellectual Three Decker and steer it straight. On the look out for disciples she readily accepted me, and I became a convert to her theological and social views, and was a most constant and earnest attendant of her "Thurs-

days." On these solemn days a number of us used to assemble in her drawing-room for the purpose of holding elevated converse on all manner of important subjects, and for the exchange of ideas.

To look at, we were, in the words of Righton, "a scratch lot," but from top to toe we were determined to be original. The object of our cult was the non-existent. In poetry we looked to it and awaited the bard of the future. All existing methods of painting displeased us, from Mr. Frith to Mr. Whistler, although we preferred the latter. We knew all contemporary art was wrong and desired something different. We had one artist amongst us who was simply waiting for inspiration to show us what form it must take. But how hopeful we were! "How noble a thing it is," said Lady Gertrude to me, "'to look into the seeds of time' in anticipation of the potentialities, beautiful and grand, they hide in their cells." "It is," I said, "the one thought that renders the vulgar present endurable."

This side of my character has not been revealed to you yet. My last remark to Lady Gertrude will make it clear. This "high-souled" sort of existence was of course, eminently fatiguing, but I was patient enough to live it once a week. My patience, my intelligence, my respectful attention, together with my youth and good looks, had made me one of the leading spirits among the little throng of "hangers-on" who hoped it would pay to worship the non-existent with Lady Gertrude as High Priestess. This is why Righton had sought me as an ally.

"I've an idea you can get round my sister," said he, as we got out of the hansom before her door. "You can sit like a Sphinx at her awful 'Thursdays,' amongst her long hair and crack-brained crew."

"My dear Righton," I exclaimed, "you ought to be proud of your sister; she is the most cultured and delightful woman I have ever met."

"Git along," said he, grinning, "or I split about your little tea parties at the Temple.

We were shown into the drawing-room, hung with dark tapestry, and ornamented with Japanese hanging pictures. On an easel was an ill-drawn pastel portrait of Lady Gertrude, her wistful anæmic face gazing between two wings of flame. Beneath was written "We are but symbols." It was the work of the artist I have referred to. We all admired it for its mystery. Righton was examining it when Lady Gertrude entered.

"My aunt, Gertie!" he exclaimed. "What a rummy portrait! What's your head burning for?"

"My dear Righton!" I interposed. "The painting is by a young and eminent artist, and is allegorical. The wings of fire represent the flight of ideas through the universe. I consider it the most original portrait I have ever seen. If you want a vulgar likeness you must go to photography. A great painter reflects the soul that burns within."

Righton always put his foot in it. When one has come to ask a favour such an indiscretion is unpardonable.

"I dessay it's all right when you get more used to it," he said, with an evident desire to mollify his sister.

"It is a work," said she, coldly, "one would hardly expect *you* to admire."

We sat down and looked at each other in silence. Lady Gertrude is one of those ladies who make it a point never to speak for speaking' sake. Theoretically her plan is excellent, but practically it does not encourage conversation. It depressed Righton, who

fidgeted on his seat, under her pale, icy blue eye. When he could bear it no longer, he said:

"I say, Martin, tell my sister what we have come about."

The Lady Gertrude's eyes turned to me, and I think there was the shadow of a warmer glimmer beneath the chill blue of her glance.

My task was not an easy one, for both had to be propitiated. I was embarrassed, but less than I appeared. Under some circumstances an exhibition of not ungraceful embarrassment is becoming.

"I think," I said, after a moment's pause, turning to Righton, "that I could speak with greater freedom if I were alone with Lady Gertrude."

"To be sure you could," exclaimed Righton. "If you don't mind, Gertie, I'll cut into the dining-room whilst you talk me over. I'm afraid you'll find me an awful bore."

Then I commenced to explain my commission. "I have promised your brother to speak to you on a matter of business, Lady Gertrude. We were friends at school, friends at college, and have been intimate ever since. Like yourself, I deplore the kind of society that Lord Righton appears to find congenial. But under such influence as yours he might readily become fitted for the high duties expected from a man of his station. You have an opportunity of helping him. Lord Righton is in need of £1,000. He has lost money at races and I am afraid at cards. Naturally he turned to his father for necessary aid. The Earl refused point-blank. Now he has requested me to ascertain whether you could lend him the money.

"He would never pay me," said Lady Gertrude.

"That contingency has occurred to me. He must

give you a mortgage of some kind and pay you a fair interest."

"If I could be assured of repayment at six months' notice I should have no objection to lend him £1,000."

"What interest would you expect?"

"Ten per cent."

"If you would let me act for you in this matter, Lady Gertrude, I think I could be of some use, both to you and your brother, and prevent him going to the Jews. He would have found it almost as cheap."

"I could be spared all risks of loss by the necessary legal instruments, I suppose, Mr. Bailey-Martin?"

"Certainly."

"Ten per cent. isn't much to ask."

What an eye for a bargain the lady had!

This side of her character was new to me and increased my respect.

"Under the circumstances, I do not think, Lady Gertrude, you could ask more."

"Perhaps not. Although I believe on such occasions some people do. But I will trust implicitly to you in this case, Mr. Bailey-Martin. You shall act for me and see the necessary documents are prepared. When they are ready for Lord Righton's signature, I shall have pleasure in handing him a cheque for the amount."

"I understand your motive, Lady Gertrude," I said, "and it is worthy of you. You wish to spare your brother's feelings by robbing this act of generosity of all appearance of favour. I will acquaint Lord Righton of your intention."

"But please make him understand that I decline to discuss the arrangement with him. It would be unbecoming."

"Of course, of course, Lady Gertrude; I appreciate the delicacy of your feelings."

I went to the dining-room, where Righton was seated on the table, swinging his short legs.

"Well?" said he.

"It's all right; Lady Gertrude will lend you the money."

"The devil she will!" he said in surprise. "But on what terms."

"At ten per cent. and a mortgage on your estate."

"That's more like her," he replied, grinning. "She's nearly as bad as the Jews. But it will keep the money in the family at all events. I wonder where she learnt the tricks of the trade. Upon my word, Martin, I believe you've been coaching her."

"On the contrary, I simply suggested she should make the advance you required. Lady Gertrude was responsible for the details. They do credit to her business capacity, I think."

"Yes, that's a sort of thing you would admire, Martin," said he. "Well, I'll accept her sisterly accommodation, and blow the expense!"

"Then I will tell her so. From motives of delicacy she does not wish to speak to you of this matter."

"Very genteel of her to be sure. But right you are, Martin, only get me the 'ouff' as soon as possible."

Then we went to the drawing-room, where Lady Gertrude gave us tea, and afterwards departed to the Celibate Club, where I dined sumptuously with Righton.

When I went back late that night to the Temple, I felt satisfied with my day's work.

CHAPTER XI.

The little stroke of business in which, it will be seen, I was of some service to Lady Gertrude, helped me still more to win her confidence, and I was frequently at her house. I perfectly understood her character. A singular mixture of shrewdness and eccentricity. The enthusiasm she devoted to her fads was not in harmony with her financial common-sense. The people who crowded about her so eagerly on her "Thursdays," wending their way to those serious gatherings in all weathers from remote corners of the metropolis, in belated 'buses, from Brixton, from Hampstead, and from obscure regions beyond the radius, touched her only at one point of sympathy. In her worship of the non-existent, she and they were of one accord. But I alone of all her personal friends understood her practical side that prevented her riding her hobbies to death. However great Lady Gertrude's zeal might be, it was rarely so excessive as to induce her to waste her money. Soon I grew the favourite at her court, and the other frequenters of her drawing-room were jealous. An earnest student of human nature, this exhibition amused me, and perhaps flattered me a little.

For several weeks I kept away from Surbiton on the plea that work detained me in London. I had told my mother of course how I had become Lady Gertrude's confidential adviser, and she fully appreciated the

importance of that office, and let our friends into the secret. "What a fine thing it would be," she said to me in one of her letters, "if you could only heal the breach in this unhappy, but noble family. It is your duty as a Christian, and would certainly be to your credit as a lawyer." My mother's notions of a barrister's duties, you see, were vague. Her letters, however, showed me she had not heard anything about Edith Lyall. My father had held his tongue to her at all events on this subject. He disliked a fuss, for when my mother was "upset" by any intelligence she chose to consider disagreeable, the whole house always felt the shock.

I had not seen Edith since the unfortunate day referred to by my father. She had written to me twice, in the terms a young lady employs to the man she expects to marry, and her letters made me uneasy. Had I gone too far, dangerously far, I mean? I was convinced she had not any evidence on which to establish a breach of promise of marriage. Besides, even if I had been fool enough to make a definite proposal in writing, I knew she would not have used it. "Why don't you write to me?" she asked in her letter. "Rather, why don't you come and see me. The secrecy in which you wish our engagement kept often places me in a difficult position." This point-blank announcement of the exaggerated view she held of the indefinite, though amatory, relations between us made me anxious. Weak men fall into a trap like this. I recalled the case of an old friend of mine who was lugged into a marriage by the brisk generalship of the young lady he was courting for the fun of the thing. It was at a dance at her father's house, and my friend had taken the girl on to the balcony to gaze on the moon. I do not know what

transpired, but to his intense surprise his companion ran into the drawing-room with tears,—tears of joy, I suppose—in her eyes and announced to her father, her mother, and her brothers, that my poor friend, who is wealthy, had proposed to her and that she had accepted him.

"Before you could say Jack Robinson," said he, sadly, "the whole family followed by their friends came on to the balcony to wish me joy."

Poor fellow! he could offer no resistance and married the lady.

Recalling this unfortunate case, it occurred to me that if Edith Lyall were to tell all her friends she were engaged to me, my position would be very awkward. It was time to come to an understanding. I was a little frightened of meeting Florence. You can never trust a woman to hold her tongue, and how could I not be sure Edith had not confided in her? If I could only arrange to divert the family attention from my affairs, I thought I might make the best possible bargain with Edith and start afresh. Then it occurred to me if Righton would visit us, my own little plans might be hidden beneath the smoke and confusion of the hour. Besides this, he admired Florence. He had met her with my mother once or twice in town, and had insisted on accompanying them to the dressmaker's. I had taken care to inform him that my father intended to give her £30,000 as a marriage portion. "Thirty thousand pounds," said Righton, "is not to be sneezed at." As a matter of fact I had never heard my father refer to his intentions on this matter at all, but I would ask you, is a girl worse off because she has the reputation of a handsome dowry? Reflect for a moment. Suppose Edith possessed even such moderate pretensions

to wealth, let us say, as £1200 a year, the efforts I was about to make to escape from an engagement would have had a perfectly opposite direction, and I should not have been compelled to smother my affections beneath the weight of duty. But he who takes passion for his guide follows a mad leader. A cold feeling crept into my heart when my resolution was formed. Reason said, "Percival! you must break with Edith," and however painful and heart-rending the rupture, I knew the voice must be obeyed.

Righton had put me up for the Celibate Club, and we generally met there. You can always recognize this aristocratic establishment by the rows of smooth-faced boys at the windows. Members of less renowned institutions declare there is a nursery upstairs for the younger members to play. They all seemed terribly young compared to me, although not a few of them were my seniors. Perhaps it was because I never acted without an object, and they never acted with one, that this singular distinction between the other "Celibates" and myself made itself felt.

Since the loan from his sister Righton had become a little more thoughtful. "There's nothing like looking to the main chance" was a phrase then frequently in his mouth. He accepted my invitation without reluctance. I wrote home immediately to my father. The tone of his letter showed I was forgiven. Righton's visit was accepted as a peace offering; I had done something to raise the family prestige. This compensated for the scandal my flirtation with Edith Lyall had excited.

I went down to Surbiton on the day before Lord Righton's visit, my father having proposed I should drive our guest down from London. He had a some-

what exaggerated idea of the honour sitting behind his horses gave.

I went down before lunch. My mother, I remember, expressed some disapproval at my appearance, and hoped I had not been studying too much. I said the atmosphere of the Law Courts was trying, and asked where Florence was.

"I believe she has gone to see Edith Lyall," she said. "That girl never comes here now. I really believe your father must have said something to offend her. She is very touchy. Do you know, Percival, I once thought she had a *penchant* for you."

"How absurd! But how is Florence?"

"Well, Percival, do you know I am not quite satisfied about her. I think there is something on her mind. I think it's that Mr. Lambert you brought here. He has called frequently and she has often met him. In fact people have been talking about them."

This was very bad news. Florence had always turned up her nose at the local youths with their strong City flavour.

I had never contemplated an entanglement of this kind.

"What have they been saying?" I inquired.

"She was indiscreet enough at the last subscription dance to give Mr. Lambert eight dances. It was so conspicuous that it was naturally remarked. You know what a place this is for scandal!"

"Lambert hasn't a penny," said I.

"Florence is a very peculiar girl," replied my mother. "Let us hope there is nothing in it."

"Has my father heard anything of this?"

"No, and I have said nothing about it. It would make him so angry."

"Well," said I, "it must be put a stop to; Lambert is probably only flirting with her."

But my mother would not allow this. She considered it the most natural thing in the world that all the young men should be in love with her daughter, although she did not exactly say so.

"Florence," she said, "is much what I was at her age, only a little lighter and more frivolous." But she agreed with me that the matter had better go no farther.

"If I talk about it to her," she said, "she will be inclined to exaggerate the importance of it. I think, Percival, you might sound her. Be half in fun, you know. Don't treat the matter seriously."

Soon my sister came in. She looked prettier than ever, but perhaps a little graver. She had not been ten minutes in the room before her manner showed me either that Edith had taken her into her confidence or that she had found me out through her own shrewdness. This made me uncomfortable, but I determined to ignore it. It is strange how popular this ostrich-like policy is even with the cleverest of us.

I commenced to talk about trifles but she answered in monosyllables. Women have this way of showing man he is in disgrace, and I always find it peculiarly irritating. It put my back up and gave me courage to carry the warfare into her own camp.

"I hear you and Bob had been to these subscription dances," said I. "How have they gone off?"

"Very well," said she.

"Any of the usual quarrelling about admission?"

"Not this time. The Committee decided to 'behave with perfect good-breeding' and to admit everyone who applied for a ticket."

"Lambert was there, I hear," I said.

"Yes."

"You danced with him eight times."

"Yes, or nine."

"That was very foolish of you. Of course you made the people talk."

"I daresay."

"Lambert hasn't a penny. It won't do, Florence."

"May I ask on what terms you are with my friend, Edith Lyall," she retorted, fixing her eyes on me.

I had expected something of this sort, but was not prepared with an answer.

"There is nothing to tell you; my father asked me the same question. I told him, as I tell you, there is nothing between us beyond a trifling flirtation that signifies nothing."

"Nothing to you, perhaps, but everything to her."

"What has Miss Lyall said?"

"She has not mentioned your name to me."

"Then how did you hear of this?"

"Through papa. He said I was not to encourage Edith to come here because of you."

"Neither he nor you need be under any anxiety on my account. I have no intention of asking Miss Lyall to marry me."

"Rumour says you have done that already."

"Then rumour lies, as it generally does."

"One thing is clear to me, Percival. You have deceived Edith and made her care for you. I know her, and I know you. I am ashamed of my brother."

Tears of anger were gathering in her eyes as she hastily left the room. This little family jar pained me greatly. Florence was terribly in earnest. This

matter, I felt, must be left no longer in suspense. I decided to see Edith directly after lunch.

Lunch when it came was a silent meal.

Florence scarcely opened her mouth. She is one of those people whose mental equilibrium is upset by a quarrel. She had convinced herself I had behaved abominably. My mother probably believed her manner was due to what I had said about Lambert, and refrained from remarking the barrier that my sister insisted in erecting between us.

Florence went to her room when lunch was over, and my mother at once asked me what had occurred.

"I can see," she said, "you have offended her."

"I merely gave her a hint not to make herself too conspicuous with Lambert. It made her angry, but I'm sure she'll take it. After all, Florence is not the sort of girl to throw herself away."

"I should think not indeed!" replied my mother. "No, Percival. There is no foolish sentiment on either side in our family. No one dislikes worldliness more than myself, but it is quite right that people should know their value and 'those who marry in haste repent at leisure.' That is what I say."

A good many other people had said the same thing before, but my mother evidently considered she had a proprietary right to the phrase.

CHAPTER XII.

The deuce was in it. How was I to tell this girl she had made a mistake. Those who have read these pages are aware that no really serious love-making, so far as I am concerned, had taken place between us. But it is hard to tell an affectionate and amiable girl, especially when she is pretty—that she has misconstrued the nature of your—what shall I say—admiration? Of this peculiar delicacy, this unaffected sympathy for the feelings of others, I have, as you must have seen, more than my share. But, alas! there are some men who are precluded from marrying dowerless daughters by the stern exigencies of nineteenth-century civilization. Would it not have been cruel for a young man of my uncertain prospects to have married Edith? What had I to offer her? Such a marriage would have estranged my father from me, and probably driven him to cut off my allowance. To give the reins to one's affections is sometimes to be guilty of selfishness, and selfishness is a fault which to my mind admits of no palliation. Self-denial is a great quality. Men, whose actions are guided by a due sense of honour and good sense, have often to exercise it. Now the time had come for me to do not what was pleasant but what was right.

Debating thus, I had walked—by the longest way —to Box Tree Road.

It was early in December. The fog had frozen to the boughs of the trees, and the branches, that stood out against the opaque atmosphere of the waning wintry day, appeared to have covered themselves with some strange arctic foliage. The hungry birds fluttering through the frozen boughs shook down tiny showers of frosty rime. All things were muffled by the mist that rose from the river, and deadened the reports of the frequent fog-signals that heralded the approach of the down trains. For a moment I stood on the steps, bracing up my nerves for the interview. The flickering light of a dancing fire lit up the window in pleasing contrast to the gloom of the dreary day without. I cannot tell how it is with other men, but with me anxiety acts as a peculiar mental stimulus, increasing this clearness of vision, and giving a strange earnestness and intensity to all the ordinary phenomena of prosaic life, converting its prose into poetry. How well I can remember those terrible bi-annual visits to the dentist with my mother! How cheerful and happy all the world, outside my frightened self, appeared as we drove thither, so much too fast! with nothing to buoy me up save the promised ten shillings from papa if I abandoned myself obediently to the horrible chair! I must now submit to a worse operation than ever as a lad I endured at the stern hands of the inexorable tooth-drawer, and, besides bearing my own share of pain, must inflict suffering on a gentle and confiding girl. It is, I say, no wonder I hesitated on the threshold and I am not ashamed of my weakness. But I rang the bell at last and asked to see Miss Lyall. The servant smiled, I thought, and in her smile conveyed a

meaning, as the smile of common people sometimes will. It seemed to say, "he has come at last to propose to Miss Edith."

Now I was in the room with the dancing fire. The maid lit the gas and departed. Edith was upstairs with her mother. Then I heard her footstep descending the stair. She entered, happy and radiant, and hurried across the room as I stood on the hearthrug. The expression on my face, I suppose, told her my visit had a painful object, for the look of expectancy in her eyes died away. I kissed her cheek for the last time.

"Why! what bad news have you brought?" she asked.

Words are capricious servants, often deserting us when we are in sore need of their best services.

"I have something hard to say," I began, "and only my strong sense of what is fair to you to give me courage to say it."

My own words were now beginning to help me on.

"Edith," I went on after a pause, "we have been living in a fool's paradise. I have been very happy there, but like Adam and Eve, we have been driven out by an angel, or rather a demon—necessity—I mean."

I paused to observe the effect; a little undercurrent of complacency at the neatness of parallel was dimly discernible to my mind.

"I can't understand you," she said.

This I felt was hard, after I had put the matter so delicately.

"I am acting for your good, Edith; the time has come when, when——"

"Do you mean when our engagement must be broken off?"

"My dear child," I said, perceiving the necessity of

plain speaking, "the relations between us were never quite on that solemn footing. We were never engaged. We have been great friends, and believe me, I still entertain the warmest affection for you, but it is not fair to you. You must marry a rich man,—although when I look at you, upon my word, I don't know one good enough for you,—and I must marry a woman of position."

But she remained silent, still.

"But don't fret, my dear child. Pretty little stories like yours and mine frequently end this way. Come, let us part friends and remain only friends."

I thought I knew Edith Lyall, but was mistaken.

Her face was white and her lips close set, when at last with an effort she answered me.

"Mr. Bailey-Martin," she said, in a hard voice, "you are mean, false, and deceitful. You have lied to me every moment I have passed in your company, and I shall never be able to forgive myself for what has passed between us. May I never see you again is my last request."

She rang the bell loudly. I heard the servant approaching to let me out. What use to stay? Later on, no doubt, she would recognise the injustice of her words. After all, her disappointment was natural. I left the room without another look at her passionate face, and in a moment more was out in the foggy air with a pang of regret in my heart, but the consciousness of having done what was right as a compensation.

Ah! but my flirtation was very pleasant while it lasted. Here the idyllic chapter of my life ends.

CHAPTER XIII.

This little business with Edith being over, I felt I could once more face my father and Florence without the faintest feeling of trepidation. If I were asked to advise a young man just entering on the threshold of life, I would tell him that if he could not entirely avoid compromising relations with all handsome and penniless girls, always to leave behind him an honourable door of escaping from the obligations that women are so ready to imagine as existing. Suppose, for instance, I had written to Edith a letter that could have been construed into a promise of marriage, I should not have been able to break with her nearly so easily. Even when a woman does not put these mischievous testimonies of youthful rashness into "the hands of" her solicitor, she can show them, and very often does show them, to her friends, and our credulous youth is compelled to pay costs before the court of local opinion in the form of a damaged reputation. In these questions of social ethics men have one code, women another, and if the conduct of the former were investigated by the standard of the latter, even Sir Galahad would scarcely pass muster, if they knew quite all about him, whilst Sir Lancelot's deficiencies would prevent the middle-classes from giving him their votes for a seat on the London School Board. Fortunately

women never do know all about us, nor is it intended that they should. I am speaking, of course, of "good women" who believe in an enduring affection as the solace of a life-time, who love sentiment and consider all marriages based on other grounds than those of personal attachment offences against their own impeccable code of impracticable morality. Take my sister Florence, for instance, as an example. With all her wit and intelligence she held these irrational notions on the relation of the sexes, and I confess I felt more pained than surprised at her unsisterly conduct towards a brother who had always looked to her making a brilliant match for her own advantage and the family honour. She refused to come into the billiard-room after dinner at my request, and carefully avoided addressing her conversation to me at dinner.

"I see you've said something to put Florence's back up," said Bob, when we were smoking over the billiard-room fire, "what is it?"

"I merely objected to her 'carrying on' so foolishly with that fellow Lambert, and I must say, Bob, you ought not to have let them get so thick at those confounded dances where they've been meeting."

"I did try, but she wouldn't listen to me. Told me to mind my own business. You know what a devil of a spirit she's got! She's awfully gone on Lambert, and so is he on her. I'm afraid it's a case."

This was a pleasant piece of news.

"How phlegmatic you are," I exclaimed, indignantly. "You should have put a 'stopper' on it at once."

Now Bob prides himself on his man-of-the-worldly knowledge.

"Put 'a stopper' on it, indeed! I'll leave that to you. I tried my best, and, short of telling the gov'nor, there

was no course to take. She snubbed me as, you bet your boots, she'll snub you again, if you try it on. She knows very well he's in earnest, and as to his not having the 'chips' she's not one of the sort to be a stickler for them. No, 'Pur,' I know Florence, and she's best let alone."

"Let alone indeed! You're talking nonsense, and look here, I should be obliged if you would address me by my full name, instead of treating me only to a fragment of it. Percival's my name."

My brother's stolid indifference over a matter of such importance to the family was very galling, or I should not perhaps have taken offence at his habit of curtailing my name of its two syllables, although his continuance in it, in spite of several strong hints, had for long annoyed me.

"All right," he said, crossly, "but if I call you Percival, I shall expect you to call me Robert. But I see what it is, you're in a bate because you think your swell pal, Righton, may propose to Florence. I know he's 'mashed' on her. But don't you fancy she'll accept him. Florence ain't like you, nor yet like the guv'nor an' me. It doesn't follow she wants Righton for a husband, just because we fancy him as a brother-in-law. I spoke to her about it, and she roared at the idea."

"Only after she met Lambert."

"Yes. But even if she had never met him, I don't believe she would have married Righton. He ain't a bad little chap, but he's not much to look at, and hasn't the brains of a snipe. Lucky for him he's a lord. I only wish it could be brought about, but it's too late now."

This conversation still more increased my uneasiness

about Florence, and I would have expostulated with her once more that evening had I not felt the occasion to be unpropitious. Yet, if Righton could be induced to propose, the matter might be settled comfortably. I knew he admired her more than any girl of his acquaintance, but he was now a little frightened of her. In his way he respected her. Moreover, the £30,000 which I had taken it on myself to give her as a marriage portion was better than no dowry at all.

I drove up to London on the next day, and found Righton in low spirits from late hours and dissipation. Since my acquaintance with Lady Gertrude had grown into friendship, I had assumed a more serious air towards him. The attitude I adopted was not, I flatter myself, unbecoming. It was that of a man who has sown his wild oats and is looking on life as a serious thing, in which for success and happiness something else than flippancy and the slang tone of the pink sporting papers is needful.

I found Righton at his chambers in Piccadilly, half-dressed.

The day was cold and slightly foggy, and Righton's eyelids were red and heavy, and his face yellower than usual from a disordered digestion. I expostulated with him, pointing out how he was spoiling his health and squandering the chances birth and talents gave him by the life he was leading.

"You are intended for better things," I said, convinced he would believe me. "Besides, these cheap excitements in the society of ballet-dancers and gamblers are unworthy of you."

"They are," he replied, dismally, "and upset me awf'ly. I find I can't drink champagne and eat *pâté*

de foie gras and lobster mayonnaise at four o'clock in the morning without looking, and what's worse, feeling as chippy as a boiled owl. Just look at my tongue."

I did. It was like a piece of flannel with a layer of soap on it. I sympathised with him on its possession.

"No man can stand this forever," he said, tying his necktie with feeble fingers. "On my mother's side we ain't long-lived. I believe my heart's weak. I feel I should like to go to bed for a year and live on brandy and soda and clear soup."

"There is only one thing for you to do," said I, impressively.

"What's that?"

"Marry. You have had a fling long enough for any reasonable man. You know your present life has become irksome to you. You have quarrelled with your father, can't get on with your mother, and don't understand Lady Gertrude. Marriage, my dear Righton, would be your salvation."

"I believe you're right, Martin. It's hard to say so after a short innings like mine, but this sort of life will end in snuffing me out."

"You ought to marry some one brilliant, beautiful and clever, able to hold her own in any society, and be a credit to the title you must soon succeed to."

I wonder if he suspected the girl I had in my mind.

"The idea of my marrying isn't a new one, though," he said, thoughtfully. "Of course, women rather jump at me, peers' sons not being so plentiful as blackberries. I don't mind telling you, Martin, that I do know one girl, a clipper too, who, who,—ah, well, who's enough to make a fellow think seriously about the business."

My heart leapt, for whom could he mean?

"I am glad," I said, "to hear you say that, Righton, and I can only hope the lady is all you imagine her to be. With your knowledge of the world you are not likely to be taken in."

Delicacy prevented me from saying more. There are, in the lives of all of us, moments of triumph, not, it is true, destined always in the sequence to be realised. One was in store for me. Suddenly Righton turned away from the looking-glass at which he had not too neatly arranged his scarf and said with some embarrassment,

"Martin, we've been friends off and on ever since we were at old Bland's together."

"There is no one living," I interposed with feeling, "whom I regard so warmly as yourself."

"I'd best be open with you," he went on, "it's fairest."

"My dear Righton," I said, "you are always the soul of candour."

"Well, Martin, to make a long story short I'm 'nutts' on your sister. I'm devilish fond of her. She's such 'snap,' and as pretty as they make 'em."

He looked at me evidently expecting me to say something, but my delight was like Pan's pipe, "blinding sweet," and for a moment closed my lips.

"My dear Righton," I exclaimed at last, "you delight me beyond words. But what can I say?"

"Say! why, tell me if you think she'll have me. Generally I should have no doubt, but your sister's diff'rent to the rest of them and never takes a chap seriously."

The question was a difficult one to answer. If I told Righton she was sure to accept him I was making

Florence needlessly cheap! If I said there were risks of his offer being rejected, I might frighten him out of making it. To stand on the family dignity was the thing. There is nothing so cheap as a dignified attitude. Underneath it can be concealed endless dulness, ignorance and vulgarity.

"You have asked me a question I can't answer, Righton," I replied. "I know nothing about the feelings Florence may entertain towards you; we are a proud and reticent family, and the idea of a match between her and you has never entered our heads. Although some good old blood flows in our veins, we are not quite of your *monde*, and the idea of a daughter of us marrying into a family into which she would be received coldly is painful to us. This may have occurred to Florence. Strange as it may seem to you who are accustomed to flattery, your possession of a title is rather against you in the eye of my people, and, possibly, of Florence too."

"Perhaps so," he interrupted, "in Florence's case, but I shouldn't think your gov'nor thought so. The idea's against human nature."

"Ah! but we Bailey-Martins are strange people; we like a man for what he is. Now, Righton, your charming qualities have endeared you to all of us. Florence, under an appearance of satirical indifference, must feel some of the pleasure your society brings with it. Your chances rest on yourself. Tell her what you feel like a man. She must decide for herself. It would not be right for us to interfere."

"Of course I can do my own courting. Have I a chance? That's what I want to know."

"The best possible one, only I wanted you to understand how the matter really is."

"Well, I'll have a shot, only don't let your sister know before I have spoken to her."

If I could have depended on Florence, how great would have been my triumph! But who can tell what a foolish girl will do?

CHAPTER XIV.

We were not very talkative during the drive to Surbiton. Righton said he would have preferred the train because it was warmer, and the slippery road rendered the pleasure of driving my father's horses a pastime of a dubious kind.

It was six o'clock by the time we reached home. Florence was not visible, having already gone up to her room to dress. After the greetings were over I took Righton up to his room, where a great fire of wood and coal was burning cheerfully.

"It's time to dress," I said; "there is no one dining here to night, thank goodness. In fact there are no people in this place fit to be introduced to you, so I wouldn't let my mother ask any of the neighbours with whom we exchange the periodical suburban dinner party."

"Quite right, Martin, quite right. But do you think your sister bolted upstairs to get out of my way? Coming down like this gives a fellow a rum feeling, you know; makes him fancy things."

But I laughed reassuringly.

"What nonsense! we were late, and Florence only went upstairs to make a more elaborate toilette in your honour. But I must be off to dress."

He called me back nervously.

"Martin! You don't think she suspects anything?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Shall I propose to her to-night, Martin?"

"I should if I were you; there's nothing like getting the matter settled."

"I think I could do it best after dinner."

"So you shall. I'll make her challenge you to billiards, and will keep the rest of the family out of the way. Keep up your spirits, Righton, and be the dashing, brilliant fellow you always are in the company of pretty women."

I left him and ran off to my father in great excitement. He was grumbling before his looking-glass about the bad colour of his shirt.

"Hallo, what's the matter," said he, "have you got a brief at last?"

"It's about Florence," I said, excitedly. "Florence and Righton. He has come down here with the intention of proposing to her."

My father was a tall, ruddy man with a bald head. The pallor of his hairless crown was in strong contrast with the rich colour of his face. But my announcement sent the blood dancing through his veins till the crown of his head distinctly glowed for an instant. It seemed to make him dizzy. If you think of it, the prospect was a great one for him. You know what his beginnings were. Now under his roof was a peer's son, about to offer marriage to his daughter.

"Be calm, my dear father, be calm," I said, anxiously.

He sat down on the side of the bed in his shirt-sleeves to recover himself, and when the colour had receded from beneath the skin of his head to those regions

where in times of peace it was won't to circulate, I told him of my recent conversation with Righton.

"He thinks," I said in conclusion, "that you intend to settle £30,000 on Florence when she marries."

"The deuce he does. Who told him so?"

"I said so; put it out as a feeler you know, but you could get off with a third of the amount; all that could be arranged. I can manage Righton."

"He won't get much out of me whilst I last," said my father, who was a true man of business. "But we needn't say anything about that till the marriage is arranged. Your sister ought to be proud."

And again the spasm of complacent self-gratulation shone through the lines of his face and the creases of his forehead.

"But suppose Florence refuse him," I said.

"Refuse him! Goodness gracious me! the thing's impossible. Fancy refusing a Lord! It's impossible, unnatural!"

"It does appear odd, I allow," replied I, "but unless we manage her, the thing's more than likely."

My father made no reply, but running to his door shouted "mar," a signal of distress evoking a "coming, my dear," from my mother below.

"Tell your mar all about it, Percival, for I'm too flustered."

I did, and before I had finished my mother was weeping with joy and excitement; and what woman in the whole of Surbiton with grown-up daughters was there who would not have sympathized at these natural tears!

"My darling child," she said, "at last there is some one worthy of her. I always felt she was fitted for a high position. How I shall miss her!"

"But, mother," said I, "she may not accept him."

The prospect effectually dried up my mother's sentiment.

"Rubbish and nonsense! accept him, of course she will."

"But you must tell her she must."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Florence will know what her duty is, and I will not interfere. I should only make mischief. Nothing puts a girl so against a lover as to have him crammed down her throat. Go and dress, Percival, or you will be late."

"Your mother's right," said my father.

On reflection I felt this was true. The matter now was left in the hands of Providence and Florence, and it would be for them to decide whether she should be Lady Righton.

You will readily understand my anxiety. I had been plotting and intriguing to bring about a marriage with Righton, and when my unselfish diplomacy for the advancement of my family ought to have been crowned with success it was depending on the caprice of a romantic and inexperienced girl.

I found Florence in the drawing-room in front of the fire; she scarcely looked at me as I entered.

"Still in disgrace," thought I. I could have endured her displeasure at any other time with equanimity. Now it was inconvenient.

"Lord Righton not down yet?" I asked cheerfully.

"You see he is not," she answered.

I did, but it was not encouraging to be told so.

"Been anywhere to-day, Florence?"

"I called on the Lyalls."

What on earth could she want there unless to pry into my affairs?

I felt she had heard something more about me. I naturally shied at the Lyalls.

"I'll go and bring Righton down," I said, hastily.

If she were as icy with Righton, I could see his proposal would never be made.

He was dressed and warming his legs before the fire.

"Is she down?" he asked.

"Yes. She seemed glad you were here. 'Go up and fetch Lord Righton, she said, to amuse me.' Something's upset her. Some misunderstanding with her friend Miss Lyall, I fancy."

Then we went down. Florence and he shook hands. She said she was afraid he had had a cold drive.

We sat down by the fire. The rest of the family were all deferring coming into the room in the vain hope Righton might make his declaration before dinner. The very servants, I am convinced, guessed what was brewing in the frosty silence of the drawing-room, where we three sat in a constrained manner before the fire. The appearance of the matronly form of my mother beaming with delight could scarcely thaw us.

I shall not easily forget that dinner. My father was jovial, my mother full of affectionate care for Righton's comfort, Bob inclined to be hilarious. I did my best to maintain the attitude of simple, unconscious dignity which, after deliberate consideration, I had found more suited to my temperament than the dashing style I had affected when at Oxford. But Florence was absorbed in her own thoughts, and paid little heed to what occurred at dinner. I assure you it was maddening. When the ladies had gone Righton was himself again. We gave him port that night, "port fit for a Pope," as he said. He waxed humorous. Port, he declared, was

the only wine which could subdue the teetotal element in his blood inherited from his mother's side of the family.

I had given Bob the necessary hint to get Florence into the billiard-room. We arranged to smoke there. Our elders refused to come on the plea it was too draughty.

"You don't think they guess what's up, do you?" Righton asked me in a suspicious whisper. But I assured him the draught was a bonâ fide current of air and chilled my father's bald head.

Florence likes billiards, and plays capitally. Bob and I sat over the fire watching and waiting for a good opportunity to leave them. A chance did not occur until I had supplied Righton with a strong brandy and soda, after which we both boldly walked off to get "some of the governor's new cigars." If I had been going to propose myself I could not have been more nervous.

Bob thought it a good joke.

"I'd give a month's screw to hear Righton 'pop the question,' and Florence decline with thanks."

There are few things to my mind more painful than to hear frivolous people joke about serious subjects.

In the drawing-room my father and mother were sitting, pretending to read the evening papers, but probably wondering what it would be like to have a peer for a son-in-law.

The minutes went by heavily till even the callous Robert was impressed. I strained my ears. The click of the billiard balls could no longer be heard in the distance. At last the door opened, and I heard Florence's step. My heart sank. I guessed she had refused him. Her face was pale but collected.

"Well, my darling," said my mother, in a voice full of meaning.

"Well, what, mamma?"

"Is it true? Am I to congratulate my child? Has Lord Righton asked her to be his wife?"

"He has asked me," she replied, "but too late. I am engaged already."

Here my memory becomes misty and uncertain. I have a sickening vision of a domestic storm, of my father scolding, and my mother weeping. There are incidents too full of pity for words, and this was one of them.

I hurried to the billiard-room, and found Righton, with his hair rough, trying to take the cork out of a soda-water bottle.

"She's refused me," he said, "because she likes another chap. I'm going to have a drink, and try and forget all about it."

I could say nothing, but in a silence full of pathos drew the cork for the man who so nearly became my brother-in-law, and emptied half of it into the liberal allowance of brandy which he had provided. Looking back, I still recall the manner in which he interposed a trembling hand.

"Don't drown it," he said, huskily, "I want it strong."

CHAPTER XV.

Florence's selfishness inflicted a serious blow on the rest of the family. But in some human disappointments there is a melancholy satisfaction. Some honours are enduring, others fleeting, and to have one's daughter rejecting the son of a peer is the next best thing to receiving him as a permanent family connection. The lesser glory had been ours and consoled my parents. Of the family wrangle that occurred on that memorable evening, naturally, the servants guessed the cause. Servants are amongst the most useful purveyors of news. In our case they were the means of starting the story through Surbiton. Those ladies who were on terms of affectionate intimacy called to see my mother and to suggest that, after all, it may be wiser to marry in one's own class. As in all other well regulated communities, brought up in the orthodox traditions of Church and State, our aristocracy is much admired at Surbiton. The value of birth is, in such centres, recognised in a manner which should serve as an example to the working-classes and to those perverted people who go to chapels and try and persuade themselves all men are equal. If Florence had become Lady Righton and fluttered away into a haughty sphere outside the reach of wealthy stock-brokers and rich City men and the elect generally of suburban

aristocracy, their sense of proportion would have received a severe shock. The marriage would have almost seemed irreligious. They would have been forever telling one another how after all the "Oloptic" was only a shop, and that once the present head of the Bailey-Martin family had sold pounds of tea with his own hand, standing behind his own counter. But that Florence should have refused a lord in order to keep her promise to a subaltern in a line regiment was pretty, sentimental, charming. And ladies at Surbiton, as well as elsewhere, "adore" idylls of this kind. It was almost like a story in the Family Herald. Consequently this incident which was a shock to us converted Florence into such a heroine, that, on the following Sunday, when my mother and she were making their way to the family pew, an audible whisper of "here she comes," ran through the sacred edifice, and some of the ladies in their eagerness to see her almost rose in their seats. She became the rage; all the other young women insisted on doing their hair in the fashion she had adopted, and two leading Ladies' Journals wrote, through their editors, to ask for her photograph.

In the first heat of his anger my father declared he would never give his consent to the marriage with Lambert. He and Florence had determined, for their own convenience, to keep their engagement a secret until he should get his company. But as the romantic nature of the match was enhanced by Florence's sacrifice of a peerage, my father went over to the side of the ladies, and he soon discovered that the Lamberts were "one of the oldest families in England." Are not their names scattered over the pages of our history? and any father might be proud to see his daughter

intermarry with a scion of the house. My mother liked Lambert, and I believe she and my father talked themselves to sleep for several nights over the advantages of this alliance. So the engagement became official, and Lambert was a frequent, as far as I am concerned a too frequent guest, at my father's house.

Personally I keenly felt the slight put upon my friend, and the ingratitude of my sister. My sensitive nature was wounded in more than one place by her rejection of Righton. There was the sense of an irreparable loss on her account, of Righton's spoilt career, and of my own wasted efforts for the happiness of either. Nor could I conceal my indignation from my sister. In a few graphic words I showed her what a position she had sacrificed to girlish caprice. "You could," I explained, "have easily broken off your engagement with Lambert after you had accepted Righton. Such things, we all know, are done in the best society every day." But how true is the saying of the heathen philosopher—Plato—is it—or Socrates? —that there are no foes like those of one's own household.

"To have one member of the family," she replied, "able to break his word when it suited his convenience is enough." Her allusion was too unfair and offensive to be tolerated.

"You are a hypocritical little shrew," I cried. "Luckily your folly will bring its own reward. To be a 'captain's lady' in a line regiment in a garrison town will cure you of your airs and graces."

This burst of temper on my part put an end to all familiar intercourse between us, and, sick of my family and their friends, I returned to my chambers in the

Temple, determined to give Surbiton a wide berth for some time to come.

Moreover, some one had invented a disgraceful piece of scandal about me and Miss Lyall. But into this I need not go. My sister, I regret to say, believed it.

But you would like to hear how Lord Righton bore his disappointment, which I cannot help thinking was a useful lesson to him. A dose of humiliation is often an excellent alterative. Still there was no reason why he should be unfair about it. For he was unfair, when he declared that I was to blame for allowing him to propose to my sister when I must have known of her attachment, if not her engagement, to Lambert.

"You egged me on, Martin," he said, "and I consider it a d—d unfriendly act."

Of course I protested.

"Pardon me, Righton," I replied, with dignity, "but you are unfair; when you asked me if I thought my sister would accept you, I said I knew nothing about her feelings. Those were my very words."

"Yes," he answered, "and you also said my title was against my chances. Bunkum! I didn't believe it. I remember I told you it was unnatural."

"It was true."

"Then it's a peculiar thing your gov'nor doesn't agree with you. He came into my room, and said your sister must be mad in refusing me, humbly apologised for the slight, and all that sort of thing. 'Try her again, m'lord,' the old chap said, 'try her again.' 'No, thanks,' I answered, 'dessay I'd make a first-rate son-in-law, but as Miss Florence likes the other Johnnie, I cave in.'"

The fatuous old fool, my father! This was the first I had heard of it. This painful scene must have taken

place whilst I was expostulating with Florence. Could anything have been more discreditable to the family?

"Look here, Martin," continued Righton, "your sister is the one of your family that ran the straightest. You let me into a nasty hole, and I shan't forget it."

This conversation, that took place in the empty smoking room of the *Celibate*, created a coolness between us, and a few days after it occurred Righton went to America without wishing me good-bye.

Righton had been the lever by which I had hoped to raise the family. He had enabled me to give them a lift too. This was now all over. So far as he was concerned they must live on their past glory. The time had come for me to think of my own future.

If my autobiography were a work of fiction, or I the hero of a novel, I should in course of time rise to eminence in my profession as a barrister. But this is an uncompromising record of facts. Any levity in their treatment on my part would rob my story of its value. I do not pretend to be a perfect character, nor have I laid it bare in its most secret places for the mere pleasure of talking about myself, but from the conviction it contains an unobtrusive moral lesson. If all contemporary literature were to be destroyed and this brief account of my career alone saved, an accurate picture of the moral condition of an intelligent, energetic, and earnest-minded young man of the upper middle-class would be preserved for future generations. Supposing Livy had left such a record of his life, how much more he would have taught us than by the historical works with which at school and college I obtained—against my will—a superficial acquaintance. No one knows what a Roman of Cæsar's time actually thought about, because none of them ever had the courage to

speak the truth. But I have. The dignity of my character and the probity of my conduct have alone permitted this. In these pages you see me at my worst. I have concealed nothing, nor am I blind to my own faults. One of our modern poets has somewhere remarked that—

> "Every heart when sifted well,
> Is a clot of warmer dust,
> Mix'd with cunning sparks of hell."

but this, as my life shows, is not always the case.

It was now clear to me that I did not possess the requisite qualities for attaining eminence at the bar. In fact, I admit that the other branch of the profession would have suited me better. I think I should have made rather a good solicitor, for I had business aptitude. But as an advocate I lacked the fervour, industry, and forensic ability necessary for success. I was tried once or twice as a junior in some trifling cases connected with the "Oloptic," which my father's interest obtained for me, but the work did not suit me. To master facts concerning which you have personally no interest, and to arrange them dexterously before a judge who has made up his mind about them before you commence to address the court, is beyond my powers. If I were to rise in the world it must be by my social qualities, not by my skill as an advocate. On the professional part of my story, therefore, I need not dwell. Beyond convincing my father that I was gradually creeping into practice, and talking vaguely to my mother of "my prospects at the Chancery Bar," to persuade her of the laborious nature of my occupations, I did not permit my profession to interfere with my plans or my pleasures. Socially I was gaining ground. I made friends

at the Celibate Club, and was invited to some "good houses." I mean where people do not ask who Mr. Bailey-Martin might be, but are ready to take him as the friend of Lord Righton or of his sister, Lady Gertrude. In suburban society, the leaders of fashion are always afraid their smartest neighbours on investigation prove merely tradespeople in disguise, with "actually a shop in the borough, my dear." You have no idea how hard it is to live down a shop. Ask my father, ask my mother; they can tell you. But in the society into which I was gradually making my way, I found amusing and agreeable people most in request. Besides, when people are "somebody," they are very ready to accept their acquaintances as "somebodies" too.

Then I found Bohemianism was fashionable, especially amongst young barristers with no briefs. The votaries of art, literature, and law, aim, at the earlier stages of their career, at the unconventional. I discovered it useful to become unconventional myself, to affect radical social ideas, to mock at the philistines, to deride English puritanism. I was elected a member of that charming little Club, the "Scalp Hunters," frequented by authors, actors, artists, journalists. I found the "Scalp Hunters" a highly amusing institution. Situated in a narrow street near the Strand, in a musty, ancient, and picturesque house the members have persuaded themselves is the centre of "intellectual London." I would hesitate myself to fix this radiant focus of the metropolitan mind in any locality, but it is natural that journalists should find it in the Strand or Fleet Street. The "Scalp Hunters," who were not intellectual, were quite willing to believe it when they were told so. The only qualifications for the club were literary, artistic, or scientific tastes. I remember my

qualifications were described in the members' book as "scientific." Why, I cannot remember, unless because once the Rev. Theophilus Bland gave me a prize for algebra when there was no one else in the school learning it. Bland used to be lavish with prizes. The boys generally believed he charged for them in the bill, but this was not the case. I remember he asked me what he should say my prize—"The Swiss Family Robinson" —was for. "Algebra, please, sir," said I. So he wrote "1st prize for Algebra" on the fly leaf, and I still possess the book as a trophy of mathematical superiority over competitors that did not exist.

But excuse this digression. I was pleased to be a "Scalp Hunter." When nearly every club was closed in London you could drop in there and find the members drinking bottled beer and eating chops and steaks, sitting round the same long table. Everybody talked at once, everybody had a funny story to tell, if he could find another member to listen. The members were rude or affectionate to each other as they chose. The club gave me a new view of life. At Surbiton we are prim and genteel; at Lady Gertrude's, serious and dull; at the "Scalp Hunters" every man was natural. Pomposity and moral starch will not protect you there. Those who suffer from either avoid it. My own manner was against me at first. My immaculate shirt front and aristocratic indifference subjected me to some derision. When at first I entered the supper-room, where the men were all smoking, some preferring long clays, they used to inquire after my friend the Duchess, and call me "the curled darling of the saloons," or ask if the *menu* at Marlborough House was to my liking, and that if not I must have it altered the next time I dined with the Prince. This was, of course, out of envy on account

of the society in which I moved, but, strange as it may seem, the rowdy rollicking club helped to remove from my manner the taint of provincialism acquired at Surbiton. People are fond of talking of the formative influences which they think have moulded their characters. The "Scalp Hunters," with its general attitude of genial defiance towards most human institutions we are taught to venerate, was not without its influence on my mental development, and has prevented me from being shocked at the most outrageous or eccentric opinion.

Apart from politics, which by the rules of the club were not discussed, radicalism in art, literature, ethics was the prevalent tone. I have actually heard a gray-haired man of letters and father of a family discourse seriously on the advantages of polygamy, and declare that personally he did not practise it on account of the expense in the then depressed state of literature. After he had advocated this in eloquent terms worthy of a better subject, all the other men present laughed, and monogamy did not find a single defender except myself. "The Scalp Hunters" were much more amusing than the Celibate, but did not wear nearly such nice clothes. The club proved a solace to me. I could unbend there, or, to be accurate, I learnt to unbend there. It was a pleasing contrast to Lady Gertrude's frigid drawing-room and tepid philosophy.

But I must not delay over details of life, pleasant though they are to look back upon. Time was moving on. Righton returned from America and ultimately took me back into his favour. I was necessary to him. The mortgage his sister held became bi-annually due, and if I had not persuaded her to renew it, would have gone hard with him.

In June my sister was married. It was a grand wedding and made a great stir. The men of Lambert's regiment sent a body-guard, and all the ladies said Florence made a lovely bride. But even then my sister and I were not cordial. She was somewhat of an unforgiving nature. I am afraid poor Lambert must have discovered this, although he is devoted to her; she had not pardoned me because Edith Lyall wilfully misunderstood my intentions. The Lamberts started for India two weeks after their marriage. The parting between us was not affectionate, nor can I forget that her last words to me were used with satirical intent.

"Good-bye, Percival," she said, gravely, as she stood on the threshold of the house she was leaving beside her husband; "good-bye, and don't forget that the first duty you owe is to yourself."

My father and mother missed her, and somehow the house was gloomy without her. There was no one to arrange the flowers, no amusing chatter to enliven the sombre dinner-table, which an aching silence would now swallow up, broken only by my father's sighs as he glanced towards her empty place. My mother and he used to talk about Florence half through the night, and Bob told me, for the first fortnight, they both cried themselves regularly to sleep. But I have no patience with such sentiment. Why two people should fret about a child who is happy because she fancies she has made a good marriage is beyond my comprehension. I could not share their grief. Why should I?

Yet, somehow at this time I was not so much in favour at home. My mother discovered I "only thought about myself," simply because I assured her she could not expect to keep her children, meaning Florence, about her all her life. How irrational old

ladies are! Next she supposed that I was so much absorbed with my own grand friends that I forgot my poor lonely parents. "Why, mother," I said, "you have Bob." Bob I admit is an odd consolation. "Bob indeed," she exclaimed, "why he is almost as selfish as you."

Having convinced herself of my selfishness, she next set about demonstrating the fact to my father. As sometimes happens with superstitious people as they advance in life, she began to take very serious views—"other worldly" views, as some one has well called them. She informed him this was because I had refused to enter the Church and had become a "lawyer." Confound it! she has always insisted I am a lawyer. I had grown too proud, she supposed, to introduce any of my high acquaintances to my family. Moreover, I was spending a great deal of money I had not earned, and only "talking about" the *Chancery Bar*. In consequence of this, my father paid me an unexpected visit at my chambers one morning about eleven o'clock before I was up. I had assisted the night before at an intellectual symposium at the "Scalp Hunters." He has a bourgeois horror of lying in bed in the morning, and is ready to believe a man capable of any atrocity who can sleep after nine o'clock. He delivered himself of a long and tedious lecture, whilst I, with a wracking headache, the result of the punch with which the "Scalp Hunters" are accustomed to refresh their wits, was dressing. He informed me that he was disappointed in me, and considered me a bad investment for his money. Bland's, Harrowby, Oxford, the Bar; they were all crammed down my throat because they had not rendered me capable of earning a penny. He was, he assured me, with needless reiteration, tired

of keeping me in idleness. To be dragged from sleep and preached at is extremely irritating, and I am afraid I did not exactly soothe him. "I give you one more year," he finally said, "after that your allowance will be stopt and you must shift for yourself."

Then, to my great relief, he left me, for my head bumped like the screw of a steamer. If one cannot find gratitude in one's own father, where is one to expect it? My readers know what I had done for the family, and here was my father reducing the whole question to one of pounds, shillings and pence. Why will English people of the middle classes estimate a man's value by his capacity for earning money?

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW days after this I had an interview with Bob. I had been obliged to give a few little dinners at the Celibate, had taken a party to Ascot, and one or two other social little festivities of that sort, besides, had rather cleared out my ready money. I could not very well ask my father for a cheque, so I naturally went to Bob, who was living at home, and who ought to have been saving money. You will, I am sure, scarcely credit it, but he refused.

"Sorry not to oblige you," he said, without a blush, "but I can't see how you will pay it back again. I'm a man of business."

Then he took advantage of my humiliating position to lecture me and to inform me how both my parents suspected me of idleness and dissipation.

"They had both persuaded themselves you were going to be Lord Chancellor," he said, maliciously, "and now they find you don't understand your business, they've cut up deuced rough. Your swell friends, after all, are no use to anybody, especially since Florence's marriage. I tell you I'm pretty sick of hearing 'em grumble about you."

"And what do you tell them?" I asked.

"Why, that it's their fault. They should have sent you to a good school and stuck you into business. What's the good o' bringing a chap up like a Duke when he ain't a Duke? That's what I ask them!"

I fancied I could hear him doing it.

I shuddered at the idea of a commercial education and the Oloptic, when I looked at Bob with his spats and his city manner. I might under other circumstances have actually grown to be something like him. Poor Bob! he never knew how dark I had to keep him, and has always been bitter because I refused to introduce him to any of my "swell friends," as he called my acquaintances. I assure you I would have no more dared to ask him to dine with me at the Celibate Club than to have invited my laundress's husband, a decent man in the plumbing and glazing line.

"The truth is, Percival," continued Bob, "you've side and cheek enough for anything. I don't deny that, but as a barrister you ain't in the running. You'd better ask the governor to make a place for you in the Oloptic, under me, you know, under me."

Fancy me in the Oloptic, and under Bob, too!

"With your patronage, Robert," I said, "perhaps, he might be induced to do so."

"You see, Percival, the gov'nor's wild because he thinks you ashamed of the family. He says you never come to Surbiton unless you want something, and as for your swell pals we never even see their coat-tails."

"My dear Robert, you don't understand, excuse me for saying so, but you really don't understand these sort of things. How do you expect men like Murgatroyd of the Guards, or Bertie Henshaw, Lord Gunsberry's eldest son, will stand you, the gov'nor and the mater. To make you all meet would be to inflict a common wrong on you all. They wouldn't understand the strong suburban flavour for which our domestic circle is remarkable, now Florence has gone, nor would any of you be comfortable in their society."

Bob was not to be made angry.

"Well, you are a 'dook,' Percival, to be sure, and really ought to have a title. I'll tell the gov'nor how very anxious you are your swell friends should not have a chance of wounding our delicate feelings. You'll, perhaps, find it a trifle humiliating, though, when you have to stick a pen behind your ear in the Oloptic office, but, perhaps, Murgatroyd o' the Guards, and Bertie Henshaw, Lord Gunsberry's eldest son, will drop in and talk to you through the trap-door, where you'll have to stamp the customers' bills. Joking apart, he swears the only way to make you work is to stop supplies, and, as you're not likely to try that beat, you'll soon find yourself in a nasty tight place."

Alas! one's own household is often the last place where one finds gratitude.

I had once, in my fond credulity, dared to think my fashionable career was pleasing to my family, but now I discovered it only hardened my brother's heart against me, and inspired him with jealousy. I, too, was learning, in the words of the psalmist, "how sharper than a serpent's tooth, it is to have a thankless" brother.

How often are we deceived in our confidence in others! My brother had refused the request I made him with gross indelicacy, and would, I doubted not, inform my father of it, in order to lower me still more in the parental esteem.

But in the picturesque, but vulgar language of my brother Robert, I was, indeed, in a somewhat "tight place." I had reached, in fact, a point in my career when it behoves a man to measure his chances as accurately as he can. My father would, if it came to the worst, find a place for me in the Oloptic. But

picture the humiliation of it. Besides, I did not possess the commonplace, vulgar qualities which would enable me to do the odious work decently. "The Celibate," the "Scalp Hunters," Lady Gertrude's supercilious drawing-room, do not prepare a man for a business career. In society, I was known as a young and agreeable man at the Bar, heir to a large income. To become a clerk at the Oloptic and peep out at the people from a trap-door, like a booking-clerk, was too degrading a position for me to consider. The Oloptic was out of the question; to endeavour to succeed at the Bar hopeless; to live on my father would become impossible in twelve short months. He was a man of his word, one that in questions of money has the courage of his prejudices. Had he not already called me a "bad investment," and assured me he was "weary of supporting me in idleness?" What was I to do? The prospect of falling ignominiously from the society into which I had so skilfully pushed my way was not endurable. I have always felt that I was intended for what is best. One of nature's aristocrats, I am ill at ease and breathe with difficulty when confined to the bourgeois social environment from which I had raised myself.

So I sat in my chambers, hour after hour, reflecting. Strange, how suddenly the truth sometimes flashes in on one! All at once the inner self with which I was communing spoke to me in a voice of encouragement and comfort. "Percival," it seemed to say, "you must marry." "Marry!" repeated the echoing thought, "Marry whom?" Then came the quiet reply, impressive and convincing, "A lady of wealth and position." I rose with a stronger pulse from the arm-chair, and looked at myself in the glass. The reflection was a

singularly pleasing one, if modesty will allow me to say so. My face has always been one that women have found attractive. I possess a silky voice, a soothing, tender manner, such as women love; a white soft hand. "As a wooer, a serious wooer," surely, I thought, "I need fear no rivals." And so the conviction grew as I perceived the way to safety lay, as in all well-regulated societies it must, in the domestic tie; the tie by which the social order of things is bound together.

"By heavens!" I cried, "I will make a great marriage." Then seizing my ivory-backed brushes, I brushed my silky brown hair back from the wide brow on which it clustered. This I did not in the spirit of vanity, but in that of thoughtful investigation. I mention it here, merely to show you the serious and practical manner in which I was preparing to enter on an undertaking which, until that moment, had been an unrealised shadow on my mind.

I have no doubt you have guessed the lady. In these confessions, personally, so far as the reader is aware, I have been associated only with two. With Edith Lyall I had broken because she was unreasonable and expected more than I was in a position to offer. Space would not allow me to give you all the details of my life. Were it possible, it would be seen that my sympathetic nature sought a delicate and refined consolation in the society of amiable women of all classes. But the spirit of love in youth is as imponderable as a gas. Its existence may be taken for granted in my case, but only so far as it has affected my career have I deemed it necessary to dwell on it. I assure you, a pretty woman cannot pass me in the street, even if she be pushing a perambulator full of other people's children,

and escape my notice. The lady of whom I was now destined to think, as you have divined, was Lady Gertrude. Life is full of compensations if we can only find them. My sister had refused Lord Righton. Now if his sister would marry me it would make a dramatic incident and connect two families whom Providence evidently designed to associate. Who could doubt it? Each wanted what the other had to give. We had beauty, vigour and energy, qualities that they, in course of time, had managed to lose. My family was rising, theirs decadent. In this process of progress and retrogression they were now moving in the same plane. Henceforth why should they not go forward together? Mine be it then to rescue a decaying but noble family, and raise it to the social supremacy it by right possessed. How inspiriting a task! how noble an ambition! No wonder it filled me with enthusiasm. At last I had a worthy object. From that day forward I determined to lay aside every trivial object that turned me from my purpose. From that day, like a knight of old, I would pin my Lady Gertrude's favours to my helm. No, no, Burke was wrong. The age of chivalry is not dead. It still flourishes amongst us here at the end of the prosaic nineteenth century in a few favoured places. Chivalry is not dead. It has merely changed its form. "The old order changeth, giving place to new." I would no longer be an idler! My resolution had been made. With a lighter heart than for many a week, I hurried off to dine at the Celibate Club, where, in honour of my resolve, I treated myself to a bottle of my favourite, not too dry champagne. For are not such days the festivals in our lives rather than the annually recurrent date when our mothers gave us birth?

CHAPTER XVII.

When I awoke on the following morning my purpose rushed over me. The enterprise seemed more arduous than ever. Our moods alter the proportions of our undertakings. With me a big thing looks colossal before breakfast. After dinner, under a different mental lens, the most formidable of its features will disappear.

When I rang Lady Gertrude's bell that afternoon a novel flutter of excitement passed within me. If I were an American novelist I would pick it to pieces, by analytical and synthetical process. For it was a big emotion teeming with meaning. But I am a plain, straightforward Englishman, and only know my heart beat, and am not ashamed to confess the weakness.

Lady Gertrude was sitting in her library, whither, as an intimate friend, I was shown by the servant. She was before a table covered with proofs and manuscripts, and looked up as I entered in a dazed manner, her pale eyes gleaming abstractedly through the glasses of her pince-nez, which had made two little dents on either side of her nose.

"Dear Lady Gertrude," I said, in the voice of feeling in which I know not why I always communicated with her, "on what weary work for the benefit of others are you now taxing your strength?"

"I am drawing up a plan for a new weekly paper. See," she said, handing me a proof, "here is the address which I propose to issue to my readers."

It was long, diffuse, tedious, full of terms picked out of Herbert Spencer's Sociology and of Frederic Harrison's Positivism, as I afterwards learnt, though at that time the tiresome writings of neither of these overrated men were familiar to me. To my sorrow I had to study them afterwards.

"It is," I said, "admirable, very admirable. To a man of culture it appeals with all the force, well—ah —all the force your plastic brain has given it. But it has one fault: it is over the heads of the people whom you are addressing." (It was over mine.)

"I feared as much," she answered.

"But," I said, "Lady Gertrude, you do not intend to undertake alone the work of starting this paper,—as yet, I perceive, without a name?"

"Sit down, Mr. Bailey-Martin. I will explain my project."

I sat down at the table beside her, whilst Lady Gertrude addressed me for three-quarters of an hour. I cannot remember her words, nor, fortunately, is it necessary.

Reduced to its lowest dimensions, her scheme was to bring out a paper to familiarise the working-classes with the teachings of the modern thinkers. Positivism, evolution, spiritualism, Biblical criticism, were all to be discussed in the leading columns, in the place of politics, whilst the paper was to be "lightened" by miscellaneous articles on literary and sociological subjects.

"The scheme is entirely novel, as you will admit," said Lady Gertrude, when at last I assured her I grasped her meaning in all its varied profundity, "and is sure to pay."

I admitted the startling nature of its novelty, but

feared it would not pay just at first. "But," I added, "in such an enterprise as the one you have undertaken with such unflinching courage, one must not regard the commercial aspect too closely."

"But I should like it to pay," she said.

"Pay it shall," I exclaimed. "Lady Gertrude, I feel I have done little for my fellow-men. I should like to do some good in the world. Will you give me a share in your scheme? Let me help to teach the grovelling mob which know not Herbert Spencer, and drag on a weary existence, day after day, in ignorance of the simplest laws of evolution. 'The hungry sheep look up and are not fed!' The Time Spirit moves, but they heed him not—the——"

But Lady Gertrude interrupted my eloquence with a thin cry of triumph.

"Eureka! you have hit it. The name of our paper shall be the 'Time Spirit,' its price a penny-ha'-penny, to suit the pocket of the more inquiring and better-paid artisan at whose conversion I aim." And Lady Gertrude beamed on me.

"It is your name," she said. "Mr. Bailey-Martin, I accept your offer of aid. You shall help me to organise this paper. Your clear, business-like brain will be invaluable."

Two hours later I returned to my chambers assistant-editor of the "Time Spirit," still in embryo. I knew no more of literary or journalistic work than of the abstruse subjects which Lady Gertrude intended to popularize. But what of that? Were we not colleagues engaged on the same task? From thence to a closer union would be but a step. It was obviously worth while submitting to considerable boredom in order to increase my influence over Lady Gertrude.

Even female philosophers are subject, possibly in a minor degree, to the amiable weakness of their sex. Any biographical dictionary will show this. "Culture" had taught Lady Gertrude to throw overboard all the ballast of caste prejudice she had inherited at her birth. A mind that had pastured on modern philosophy naturally prefers "worth to rank and high estate." "Philosophy's sweet milk," was all on my side. In that long and intimate talk on sociological subjects on which the "Time Spirit" was to throw light I ascertained that on all questions of the relations of the sexes, Lady Gertrude held the most liberal notions. She was not, she admitted, prepared to go so far as some of her radical friends, and substitute for the marriage tie a partnership that might be broken to suit the caprice of "either contracting party;" although she granted a more advanced stage in social evolution would probably see "striking modifications in the existing customs." This gave me an opportunity of stating my opinion. "As we are to work together," said I, "perhaps I had better frankly state my views. I fear you will think them old-fashioned. A man can have but one guide in these matters. Love is amongst the elemental forces of our nature. When the affections speak, the intellect is silent."

With a sigh half suppressed, Lady Gertrude feared I was right.

I had made Lady Gertrude a number of promises about the "Time Spirit," which, unaided, I could not have fulfilled. I knew nothing about journalism, but I was acquainted with a good many journalists, from the pompous producers of leading articles in the London daily papers, to the shiny-sleeved contributors to the cheap society journals. To all young men commencing

life I have another important piece of advice to give: Cherish the society journalist, make a friend of him, ask him to show you his articles, praise them lavishly. Assure him their "style is refined and graphic," or "vigorous and incisive," as the case may be. Give him cigars, and, if presentable, invite him to lunch at your Club. The money and trouble will not be wasted. You never know when you may need his help. I have known professional men rise to eminence and fortune by a dexterous use of journalists. They are a good-natured, easy-going race. A puffing paragraph costs them little, and may mean much to you. The "Scalp Hunters" swarmed with them. The "Time Spirit" wanted their help.

On the evening after my visit to Lady Gertrude I went there, and found the man I wanted drinking whiskey and water and smoking a briar-root pipe. His name is Blake. Not many of the "Scalp Hunters" knew this, for he is generally known as "Jimmie." This identifies him anywhere. He is a clever little, idle, dissolute fellow, endowed with what seems to me an almost miraculous power of stringing phrases together. It is strange to find he often knows no more of the subject on which he has been writing than can be learnt by a brief and hurried glance at the pages of a second-hand, out-of-date encyclopedia. Of the modern thinkers at whom Lady Gertrude proposed to set her literary cap, I am sure he knew no more than I did; but I was convinced he was able to write about them by the yard. Jimmie is not a very sober man, and, what is worse in Fleet Street, not to be relied upon. Editors cannot trust the reckless phrase-spinner, so he lives, as he says, on "a column here, a half-column there," like a London sparrow on the crumbs of accident. Jimmie is much

liked at the "Scalp Hunters," although always in arrears with his subscription and in debt to the steward. The Committee allow him unusual latitude, and, generally, one of his friends pays his annual subscription and settles the claim of the steward, or little Jimmie would have his name erased from the list of "Scalp Hunters." Though he has tumbled downstairs twice, and fallen asleep at the supper-table when guests of distinction have been present, the Club remains true to Jimmie, though he sadly disgraces it. He is, they fondly imagine, a survival of a type of the London literary Bohemian fast disappearing, and so they are proud of him. Jimmie was to be had cheap, and I meant to employ him on the "Time Spirit."

I soon explained what I wanted.

"You edit a paper, Martin," he said, his little red and watery eyes rolling with surprise, "well, I'm blowed! what next, I wonder."

Then I informed him that a man of title and fortune was desirous of starting a paper and had appointed me as editor of it.

"But will he pay?" asked Jimmie, "and how much a column?"

These, I said, were questions to be settled later. The name of the proprietor must be kept secret, but I assured him he should be remunerated for his help. I refused to tell him more that evening, and made an appointment for the following day at my chambers. He appeared, washed, shaved, and brushed, in quite a business-like mood. Then I disclosed to him the object of the paper and its name. He screamed with laughter, but supposed that as long as my swell friend was willing "to drop" his money he and I might as well pick it up.

"What a privilege it is to possess an intelligent aristocracy, to be sure. This one will work wonders amongst the masses with his three-ha'porth of well-watered philosophy. I suppose you want me to do the mixing. Well, what are the terms? Come. I'll contribute for a quid a column. I can't speak 'fairer nor that.'"

Finally, Jimmie introduced me to a grey-haired old gentleman in a narrow street near Fetter Lane, who was willing to "do the publishing for us." The publisher introduced me to his son-in-law, who undertook to do the printing. With Jimmie's aid, I made some other initial arrangements, enlisting in our service a young Jew, included in the wide circle of Jimmie's friends, as a "useful gentleman to get advertisements." Finally, in three or four days, I had smoothed the way for the appearance of the "Time Spirit."

Lady Gertrude was delighted with everything, except the expenses. "Where is the money to come from?" said she.

Then a happy thought occurred to me.

"If," said I, "you will subscribe the first £1,000, I will subscribe the second. By that time, it will be a paying concern."

She consented with a wry face, and paid the sum into a bank in the name of the "Time Spirit," from which I could draw for the current expenses.

Oh, those happy days, full of moments of hope, of charming intimacy, when Gertrude—she permitted me now to call her Gertrude—and I worked together. She wrote all the leading articles, which I passed on to Jimmie, secretly retained by me at a remuneration of £5 a week, to "lick into shape," as he said. How they made him laugh! But they were so smartened up when

he gave me a corrected proof that Gertrude was delighted.

"You have given me exactly the popular touch I need," she said, much pleased with our double performance.

At last, the first number of the "Time Spirit" appeared. Gertrude welcomed it with as much tenderness as most women lavish on a baby. But was it not our intellectual child? We sold five hundred copies and printed a thousand. On the day of its publication, a string of sandwich-men paraded the streets, announcing the first issue of a weekly journal intended "to fill" the usual intellectual void. But perhaps you have seen the poster. Both the paper and poster excited much hilarity at the "Scalp Hunters."

Lord Righton was, I regret to say, opposed to the rapidly-increasing intimacy between his sister and myself, but, as he owed her money, he did not for some time find it convenient to interfere himself, although, as I afterwards learnt, requested his mother to point out to Lady Gertrude the indiscretion of her conduct. Our literary partnership brought us into the closest intimacy. We dined together, visited the play together, were seen together at Private Views, in the Park, in Piccadilly. I was becoming necessary to Lady Gertrude. Once when I ran down to Surbiton for a respite from the "Time Spirit," she wrote, requesting me to return, as she needed my advice.

Finally, after thirty-four years of virtuous, if eccentric, spinsterhood, fourteen of which had been spent in her own home, scandal began to wag its wicked tongue. Society papers reported that "Lady G., the editor of the new philosophic weekly, was present at the Private View of Mr. So-and-So's pictures in Bond Street, accompanied, of course, by Mr. P. B-M."

The human mind is a very strange contrivance. You would naturally consider it would pain a lady of Gertrude's sensitive morals to be the subject of scandalous rumours. It had exactly a contrary effect. It actually pleased her. Of course she never said so, but she never missed an opportunity of being seen in public with me. At last, just after the publication of our fourth number, of which we sold only three hundred copies, and printed four columns of decoy advertisements, a letter of expostulation was sent to Lady Gertrude by her mother, the Countess of Marlington. We were looking over proofs together in her library when it arrived.

"From my mother," said Gertrude. "It is two years since she last wrote. What can she want?" A flush faintly showed on her pale cheeks as she read it. It did not arise from displeasure, although I felt it would be wise to pretend it did.

"I fear your letter gives you pain," I said, gently.

"It is," she replied, "an impertinent communication from the bigoted old lady I possess as a mother."

"I have feared something of the kind for long," I said. "You have had the courage to step aside from the conventional path, and, like all other social reformers, must pay the penalty of your daring."

"You shall read it," she said, and passed the letter to me.

"Your conduct, Gertrude," wrote the old lady, in an exasperating hand, "has gone from bad to worse in the godless career you have chosen for yourself. I now learn, on the convincing authority of your own printed word, that you are wasting your fortune in the

dissemination of infidel doctrines, in the company of a young man of the middle class, whom you have trained in your own atheistical views. You are disgracing your family and your class, whilst I am, alas!

"Your sorrowing

"MOTHER."

But the Countess's letter was my opportunity; and my heart swelled with emotion as I exclaimed, "Then my worst fears have been realised. Our friendship and our innocence have marked us out. Ah! Gertrude, Gertrude! I ought to have known this before. Women who separate themselves from the crowd, as you have done, who are oblivious to stale traditions as you have been, whose talents and lofty aims are misunderstood by the ignorant and idle society surrounding them, have ever been the victims of malignity and abuse."

"I can bear it," she said, with proud contempt.

"But I cannot," I cried. "You have inspired me with feelings I dare not express. To remain longer in your society would be to wrong you more." Here I rose to my feet. "Gertrude!" I continued, "I must leave you. Henceforth the object of my life will be to teach the world how it has maligned you. Farewell."

Seizing her hand, I imprinted a kiss on it, and rushed from the room before she could bid me stay.

I had rehearsed the scene before in my mind, and, naturally, when it came on I was ready with my part. For tedious weeks I had waited for it, chained, like a galley-slave, to the "Time Spirit." Not a suggestion of love had escaped me. I had now launched the first arrow. Gertrude had an excellent memory. She would recall how she had "inspired me with feelings I dared not express," and how I had left her to avenge,

in some dim way, the wrong the world had done her in accusing her of indiscreet conduct with a man eight years her junior.

The next morning brought no letter from Gertrude. This made me uneasy. Had I acted wisely? Suppose she took me at my word? Fortunately, there was the "Time Spirit" to bring out. I wrote, requesting her to forward her articles to my chambers. "I cannot," I said, with quiet dignity, "forget what is due to you, nor to the public."

That evening brought me an answer. My whole frame glowed as I read it, yet I have been accused of coldness and selfishness. Gertrude said, "You need not leave me. The difference between us, to which you refer, is a shadowy barrier. Why not work together to the end." This touching and simple note brought tears into my eyes. Dear Lady Gertrude! She fancied I had not asked her to be my wife because of our difference of rank! She had not quite understood me. but what did that matter? Five minutes later I was in a hansom hurrying to Kensington.

She was in the drawing-room alone. Lord Righton, I heard, had just departed. The servant announced me. She wore, I remember, a handsome dress of green velvet, and the diamonds sparkled in her short, straight hair. I felt the diamonds were for me, the toilet for me, that smile of welcome for me. For once she had abandoned her Spartan simplicity. The scene is too sacred for these pages. Looking back to it, it is blurred with excitement. Gertrude was mine. We talked long and earnestly. Lord Righton, she told me, had declared that if she accepted me he would never speak to her again. "If I had had any hesitation," she said, "that would have decided me."

When I left that night I hurried to the "Scalp Hunters," and informed the members sitting round the supper-table that I was about to marry "Lady Gertrude Barton, only daughter of the Earl of Marlington."

A shout went up, "Hurray!" cried a voice of an Irish journalist, "fancy a Scalp Hunter marrying a peer's daughter. Let us dhrink her health, Martin, at your expense, my bhoy!"

I reflected. No, it was not a moment for economy.

In the midst of the expectant silence, I said, "Waiter, bring up half a dozen bottles of the champagne I usually drink."

I knew the story of my engagement would be in every little society paper in the kingdom, and determined to send the announcement of it with the usual fee to the "Morning Post" in the morning.

The champagne, poured on to whiskey, brandy, stout, lager beer, mounted into the heads of the "Scalp Hunters" and unloosed their tongues. How all these good fellows rejoiced at my success. Such an event had not occurred in the annals of the Club. Soon they began to see a bright and glorious prospect before me—the House of Commons, beyond a doubt; the Woolsack, possibly. They thought, however, that I should be none the worse for my glimpse of Bohemia. Every fresh member who entered the Club that night was informed of the event, and uttered our war-cry in my honour. Poor little Jimmie, already overcome by his potations, wept on to a Welsh rarebit. "Just fancy," he said, "being 'sweated' by a chap who goes and marries a peer's daughter! Here am I, a man o' genius too—without a fiver to my name. It's rough, I tell you, deuced rough!"

Excited though I was, I despatched a letter that night to my mother at Surbiton, informing her of my engagement, and when I went to sleep the bed seemed to be the spoke of a wheel which revolved through a land of orange blossoms and laurels.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE are, I should think, few more pleasurable feelings than to wake up in the morning to the consciousness that you are going to marry a peer's daughter. I mean, of course, for a man in my position. Without being wealthy, judged from the vulgar standard of the millionaire, Lady Gertrude had a fortune. Her husband, at any rate, need not worry himself about making an income at the Bar. "How about accepting a clerkship in the Oloptic under you, Robert?" I said gleefully to myself, as I turned over and tried to go to sleep again. But there was that wretched "Time Spirit" to bring out. Jimmie did all the work. The "copy" my future wife failed to supply he picked up with his paste-pot and scissors. "The people who buy the evening papers have no idea how important these editorial implements always are," he once said to me. Dear Gertrude! how readily she believed that an article on "The Relation of Mind to Matter," from an American scientific monthly, that Jimmie had "scissored" to fill up an empty column, was my own work. But this "Time Spirit" must be stopped; it was wasting too much money, our money, and was, besides, an intolerable bore. How on earth should I ever get it through the press if Jimmie "got on the drink?" It was only by watching over him like a keeper on Friday (we published on Saturday)—that a catastrophe was averted. Gertrude would have never forgiven me if

some untoward accident, such as the helpless intoxication of the actual editor, had prevented its appearance. It was impossible to snuff out the confounded "Time Spirit" before we were married. I feared to suggest the idea. It was her most delightful hobby. To see her articles, with a sort of literary edge added to them by Jimmie, was as fire and incense at the altar of her vanity.

Naturally thrifty, as all people well versed in political and other economy should be, she never grudged herself that luxury.

I knew I must hurry matters on and be married as soon as possible. There was no reason for delay, rather were there risks.

After breakfast, I wrote a little affectionate note to Gertrude, and then hurried down to my family at Surbiton, to enjoy my triumph. My letter of the previous evening would, I knew, have reached them by the second post and have created the greatest excitement in the domestic circle. As I walked from the station my heart swelled with a sentiment of wholesome satisfaction. I was returning as no prodigal, as no suppliant for a clerkship under my brother Robert, but as the affianced husband of Lady Gertrude Barton, only daughter of the Earl of Marlington.

My father I found glowing with delight and excitement; he wrung my hand.

"Your news," he said, "surprised and pleased me so much that I felt I ought to give myself a holiday."

"Well, sir," I said, with a certain feeling of one who has been misjudged, "I hope you perceive now I am not the 'bad investment' you thought me the other day."

The poor old fellow quite winced.

"My dear boy," he said, quite tragically, "don't refer to the past. We old fellows are not always so wise as we fancy ourselves—after all, your mother and I have but one wish,—the happiness of our children."

I wondered how many times I had heard him say this. It is an agreeable sight to see one's parent eat a meek dish of humble-pie. Only a few days before I had seen this apologetic old gentleman perorating in my chambers, overflowing with virtuous indignation, like a heavy father in a melodrama. These minor satisfactions success procures one are delightfully soothing to a proud nature.

"You may trust me, sir," said I, "not to allude to this matter, since it is naturally unpleasant to you. Without boasting, I think I may say that I have gained myself a wife and you a daughter-in-law of whom our family must be proud. I need not dwell on the prospects an alliance with this ancient and noble family offer. But I have a favour to ask you. My expenses have naturally been heavy, and——"

But he interrupted me.

"Short of money, eh? Why didn't you write?"

I think he was glad of it. It placed us on a footing of equality.

He opened his drawer, we were in the library, and produced his cheque-book. "This," said he, "will help you along for a week or two. When you marry you may rely on me to do what is right."

I could not help smiling. Suppose I had announced to him that I was about to marry Edith Lyall, how about the cheque-book then?

"Thank you," said I, graciously, pocketing his cheque for £200, "this will do capitally."

At my filial approbation his face quite brightened

up. It was, of course, a great comfort for him to look back to his own humble beginnings and forward to the brilliant career now opening to me.

But my mother entered the room and embraced me excitedly. She had always foreseen this, of course. When she had taken me down to the Rev. Theophilus Bland, she had always predicted the Marlington family was destined to become associated with our own. She had quite forgotten my selfishness, and particularly plumed herself on the share she had had in moulding me. "It was your mother, Percival, who insisted that you should enjoy every advantage education and training could give, in spite of the expense."

How strange people are to be sure, and how inaccurate! If my dear mamma had had her way with me I should have been a curate.

But I willingly admitted her foresight, and gave myself over to be petted until the evening, when Bob returned from London.

My brother congratulated me with the utmost warmth.

"Thank you, Robert," I said, "thank you. Lady Gertrude and myself will know how to make ourselves happy. Under the present circumstances it will not be necessary for me to take the place behind the trap-door that you were so kind as to offer me in the Oloptic!"

"Oh, never mind my chaff," he said, growing unpleasantly red, "and look here, about that loan, my cheque-book's at your disposal whenever you like."

"I am in no need of funds now, Robert," I said with meaning. "Your offer comes too late. But I will remember it all the same."

Then I recalled the well-known adage of the Latin

Grammar, culled to exemplify a rule I do not remember, from a Roman poet whose name I also forget, about prosperity and troops of friends, and adversity and their absence. But I quoted it to Bob.

I slept that night at Surbiton and returned to town the next morning, bearing in my hand the "Morning Post," containing the following amongst its Court news:

"A marriage has been arranged between Mr. Percival Bailey-Martin and Lady Gertrude Barton, only daughter of the Earl of Marlington."

I hastened to Kensington to see Gertrude, and found her coldly indignant at the unfeeling manner in which her family received the news of her proposed marriage with me. The Earl, who cordially disliked his cultured and talented daughter, wrote as follows:

"I hear you are going to marry the son of a rich grocer. Of course it has no interest to me. Only don't expect me to receive the fellow, or come to your wedding, which, if you follow my advice, will be as quiet as possible. Surely, a woman of your age doesn't want orange-blossoms and the wedding-march."

This heartless epistle I did not see until long after, otherwise I should have resented it as it deserved. But Gertrude showed me her mother's letter, which, although unfeeling and discourteous, was less absolutely brutal than that of the vicious old earl.

"Dear Gertrude,"—

"I cannot say that I approve of your marriage, but it is less reprehensible than a life in which you set society at defiance. Marriage has many cares, and will, I hope, cure you of some of the absurd notions which you mistake for philosophy. My health, I regret to

say, will prevent me from being present at your wedding, which I trust will take place in a church. It will also prevent me from making the acquaintance of the young man to whom you are entrusting your future."

I sighed when I read this epistle, to which her mother's signature was attached, but, like adversity, I felt it had its uses. Lady Gertrude's views were entirely on the side of a civil wedding. Now, a marriage before the registrar would have annoyed the countess and not displeased the earl. Her parents' letters had simply had the effect of making her desire to irritate them both as much as possible. Fortunately, ritualism was almost as odious to the countess, a bitter Calvinist of the ultra-Evangelical school, as infidelity. To be married amidst incense, banners, flowers, white-stoled warbling choristers, and all the other pomps and ceremonies that fervid ecclesiastical imagination and an elastic marriage-service can conceive, would annoy both her parents equally. Such a marriage would delight my own family, and give all our friends and enemies an opportunity of enjoying or sorrowing at my triumph. Great is the delight enjoyed by the modern civilised being in annoying his relations. To this feeling Gertrude was willing to sacrifice the austerity of her secular principles. I was, of course, too full of affectionate tact to trace this sentiment to its source, and attributed it to a desire to gratify the old-fashioned notions of my own family. We fixed our marriage six weeks from that day. My time was fully occupied. There was the wretched "Time Spirit" to bring out every week. Its sale was dwindling slowly, but Gertrude was sanguine, and I felt it was wise to let the thing

exist until I had ceased to be a bachelor. Moreover, the necessity of her weekly article kept her quiet and gave me more time to myself. I had taken care the society papers should paragraph our marriage. I meant the church should be full.

Mysterious little "pars," as the journalists call them, were circulated, referring to the probable magnificence of our approaching union. Then Lord Righton had to be won over. I wanted him to give his sister away. I wrote an affectionate letter, appealing to him on the strength of our long friendship to give us his fraternal countenance. But he did not answer my letter. I was not surprised. Then I interviewed him on the subject. He was as unpleasant as he could be. He knew, of course, why I was marrying Gertrude. "She ain't young," he said, coarsely, "and never was pretty. But you'll put up with that. When you go about together you look like her nephew." I was deeply pained. Fortunately there was that mortgage. I referred to it gently, deprecatingly, suggesting how desirous I had always been to help him, and how grieved I was to see he disregarded his sister's wishes.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last. "If Gertrude will write me a letter, saying that the beastly loan you and she are always holding over my head needn't be paid till I come into the title, I'll do the c'rect thing at your wedding. It will be a pull, but I'll do it." This bargain was concluded. But how Gertrude and I despised him for his heartless and sordid conduct!

At last the eventful day arrived. Lady Gertrude had stayed with us at Surbiton, and for my sake—and every day I was becoming more necessary to her—put up with my relations.

Besides, I explained to her that her graciousness to them would add to our income. To the silent wrath of Robert, my father made over to me £25,000 as my share in his property.

I felt, however, if we managed him we might have more some day. It assumed the form of a wedding-gift. "The bridegroom's father gave the happy couple a cheque for £25,000 as a wedding-gift." The magnificence of this present was much commented on at the time.

I cannot describe the wedding. The ladies flocked up from Surbiton to see it. There was a smell of incense and flowers. Four distant relatives of Gertrude's, charming pink and white cousins, acted as bride's-maids, and two little lads dressed as pages bore the long train of the bride. Bridal attire did not, I admit, suit dear Gertrude, it is becoming to few; but with a little rouge, dexterously applied, she carried it off, and I know the Surbiton ladies thought her very aristocratic. Lord Righton looked very yellow and sulky throughout the imposing ceremony. Murgatroyd of the Guards—one of the smartest men about town—was my best man. The place belonged to Robert, but when I explained to him how impossible it was, under the circumstances, for him to act for me, the poor fellow really took it very nicely.

There was a grand reception at Lady Gertrude's, described in all the fashionable society papers, by a great friend of mine, a "Scalp Hunter" invited for the purpose. He assured the world, in an eloquent account drawn up one or two days before the event, that "the Earl and Countess of Marlington were prevented from attending the wedding, owing to a violent attack of influenza which had prostrated them both."

Their gifts were hinted mysteriously to represent two cheques of almost fabulous value. My wife and I had reason to know the two wicked old people were highly exasperated. The day was one of meteoric brilliance.

When at last we left for Paris, I felt myself riding on the crest of a magnificent wave of success. Talk of love! Well—Gertrude was warmly attached to me. Besides, a reasonable man can do without that. Had I not conquered? Was I not about to embark on a new sea in a new ship and with an untried but promising crew?

CHAPTER XIX.

Were I given to moralising I should enjoy at this point in my autobiography an opportunity not to be wasted. I had made a brilliant match, and all the world was before me. I can even now recall my thoughts as the express hurried us to Dover. I fancy I still see the guard, with that fatuous air of obsequious patronage his kind always display towards the newly-married, locking us in our carriage with the assurance no other passenger should be admitted. Why on earth he should have suspected us I cannot tell. Gertrude did not look like a bride. She commenced her married life with a splitting headache, and leant back in her seat with her eyes closed, comforting herself with smelling-salts, which she always carried, and an occasional effort to read her own article in the last number of the "Time Spirit." Strange solace for a bride! Perceiving from the dark lines gathering beneath her eyes that conversation would only increase her nervous exhaustion, I sat at the further end of the carriage and looked out of the window. The clanging and uproar of the train, which my wife informed me represented to her mind pulsations of pain in her aching brow, rang in my ears like the roar of a triumphant voice. Had I not made all my runs off my own bat? The little pale person in the other corner, Lady Gertrude Bailey-Martin, the captive of my bow and spear, belonged to a social caste to which all that is best and most respectable in the great English middle-

class pays perpetual homage. She had just sworn to love, honour, and obey me. I have never pretended that my marriage was an ideal one. Out of three-volume novels I don't believe they exist. A wife with a headache, smelling-salts, and a dull newspaper article of her own composition as a comfort does not represent the highest form of bliss at the commencement of a honeymoon. "But, never mind," said the consolatory voice heard above the grinding and clatter of the wheels—"never mind, she is Lady Gertrude Bailey-Martin." And what golden dreams to my youth and inexperience did not her rank breed in my brain!

I continued to build castles in the air, in which I seemed to move from one success to another, now addressing an imaginary speech to applauding constituents, now serving my country as one of Her Majesty's ministers, surrounded by shadowy throngs of admiring friends, and always on a platform above them.

But the grinding of the air-brake warned me we were entering the terminus.

"I hope, Gertrude," I said, "your headache is better."

"It is worse," she said—a little crossly—"I think, travelling always makes me ill. I want a cup of tea."

"You will be all right to-morrow," I said, consolingly, as I handed her on to the platform.

I can still remember the pleasure with which I inscribed our names, "Mr. Percival and Lady Gertrude Bailey-Martin," in the visitors' book at the hotel.

That evening Gertrude's maid informed me her mistress was too unwell to come down to dinner, so I dined alone, under the circumstances with considerable cheerfulness.

On the following day we started for Paris. The

crossing was rough, and my wife suffered. I handed her over to the care of her maid, a tough little Scotch-woman. The sea and the wind always increased my spirits and appetite.

"If I ever do any yachting," said I, as she was going to join the throng of suffering women below, "it must be alone."

"My lady will take good care of that, sir," said the maid.

The characters of all married couples are revealed to each other gradually, and by a hundred and one little incidents. The process is always more or less painful. No woman is ever a heroine of romance to her husband, at least such is my experience. I am aware some men pretend to entertain a poetic attachment to their wives after ten years of wedlock, but I regret I cannot believe in the sincerity of the sentiment. Two hours in a dancing packet-boat is enough to reduce ninety-five out of a hundred honeymoons to bathos. The gray waves, splashing their foaming tops off on the deck, the vertiguous movements of sea and sky, the great draughts of damp sea-wind brought the blood in my face, reaching I know not what rough sea-instinct within me. Surely some ancestor of the Bailey-Martins must have been a Sea King. I remember, when I once made this remark to Florence, she replied, "More probably a purser." The tossing, salt, windy sea exhilarates me and the ozone mixes congenially with my blood. With poor Gertrude it was different. The very smell of a steamer appals her. For me, cold roast beef and bottled stout; for her, ninety minutes' torture and a deranged stomach for two days! Truly, a healthy wife is a blessing to her husband. Strange, I could see the pleasure the brief crossing gave me irritated her. What

was it she expected me to do or say that I omitted? Perhaps she thought I was wanting in sympathy. But this was absurd. Her maid must have understood her constitution far better than I. When a woman is sick, a man is in the way. Besides, there is nothing more unpleasant than to see others suffer—especially between Dover and Calais.

But we arrived in Paris at last.

My wife did not recover from her journey for two days. I spent the time in re-visiting my old haunts. She was obliged to take her meals upstairs, consisting of *bouillon*, or the French equivalent for beef-tea. Clarkson, her maid, assured me her mistress required rest. I let her have it, and passed my time on the boulevards, dining and lunching at most expensive restaurants, where the cooking was more novel and far more to my taste than at the hotel. Famous restaurants I had feared to dine at when a pupil at Passy capitulated now before my well-filled purse.

On the third day, however, Gertrude was well enough to be my companion again. It was, moreover, the date for the appearance of the "Time Spirit." Secretly I had determined it should expire when I married. Gertrude believed the next number was in the hands of the printer, under the direction of our immaculate sub-editor, but I knew it was in the hands of the executioner. Already she was projecting the next issue. Poor Gertrude! As I anticipated, or perhaps suggested, Jemmie got drunk. Instead of the copy of the journal she was expecting, there came a letter from the printers, enclosing a long bill, and informing me that as "Mr. James Blake was unable to provide the copy the paper could not appear."

I passed the letter across the table to Gertrude.

"If you want a thing done," said I sadly, "you must do it yourself, and I trusted Jemmie Blake so implicitly."

"You mean," she said, with a bitterness that pained me, "if I want a thing done I must do it myself. Let us be accurate."

I was too surprised to retort. The decease of our stupid little twaddling paper was a serious shock to my wife.

"You had no right," she added, "to leave it in incompetent hands."

"Incompetent!" cried I; "there is not an abler man in London than Blake, when he is sober."

"If you knew he was a drunkard, why did you engage him?"

"Because I believed his promise."

"Then you are a——" I believe she intended to say fool, but she checked herself, adding, "criminally careless and heedless of my wishes."

The imperious ring in her voice annoyed me. It foreboded a conflict of wills. I perceived she must be propitiated. Diplomacy, not war, was needed.

"Now, Gertrude," said I gently, "do not say unkind things. They pain me. I am not used to them. My disappointment is as great as your own; why increase it? Let us make the best of it. The 'Time Spirit' was not making its way. Last week we sold only 150 copies. To elevate the masses is an expensive undertaking, especially when they won't buy the paper. Even if the sub-editor had not played us false, the paper must have finally died for want of readers. No, no, Gertrude! there are bigger successes for you than journalism can give. You might become a power in politics if we worked together. I will get into the House; your

drawing-room shall be the political salon of the future." But I think you can guess what arguments I used. At last I flattered her into a state of comparative complacency.

"If politics do not suffice for your mental activity," I said, "write a book upon 'conduct,' instead of scattering your teachings in fragments on the world in a newspaper nobody reads."

The extinction of the "Time Spirit," however, weighed upon her mind for some time. If she had lost a baby she could have hardly been more depressed. Whether she believed in the sincerity of my regret I have never known.

From Paris we went to Geneva, thence to Chamounix. At the hotel we made the acquaintance of two Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Silas A. Todd. The former, a somewhat withered and elderly, but wealthy, citizen from Connecticut; the latter (his six months' bride) from Boston.

He was fifty, she twenty and pretty. She was proud of her good looks, prouder still of her "culture." It was this that brought her into contact with my wife. I fancy Mrs. Silas A. Todd—the Todds laid great stress on the "A."—was not enjoying her wedding-trip so much as she anticipated. She was a person of refreshing frankness, and confessed to me she looked upon the uninteresting person she had married somewhat in the same manner as we may suppose the convict regards the shot tied to his leg.

"The next time I come to Europe," she said, "I shall come without Mr. Silas A. Todd."

The lady prided herself especially on the possession of that peculiarly American quality of "brightness," a quality that appears to be derived in equal parts from

mental quickness, superficial knowledge, and physical restlessness. It must, I think, be exceedingly fatiguing to possess it.

I think Lady Gertrude and myself were a Godsend to Mrs. Silas, who must have been anxious to throw her brightness on objects endowed with a greater capacity of reflecting it than her admiring spouse. I remember she had reduced him into so pronounced a state of geographical bewilderment by the wind of her speed, that he could not remember even the names of places they had visited without recourse to his guide-book.

They had arrived at the hotel at Chamounix about two hours before ourselves. The same roof had not shielded us a single day from the dazzling July sun before Mrs. Todd had found out all about us, and had introduced herself to my wife. They met in the Hall. With an air of assurance which in an Englishwoman would have been impertinent, but which the world expects from an American when she is young, she insisted on shaking hands with my wife.

"I heard of you in Boston, Lady Bailey-Martin," she said, "before you were married. Your articles in the 'Time Spirit' have made me look on you as a friend. I am Mrs. Silas A. Todd, and I just fall down and worship talent like yours—we are made like that in America. That is Silas—the grey old gentleman in the straw hat trying to understand the booking-clerk's English. Now, introduce me to Mr. Bailey-Martin. I read all about your high-toned marriage in the papers."

You have only to admire Gertrude for her literary talents to gain her confidence. She introduced me at once, and informed me afterwards she considered Mrs. Todd's charm of manner was only equalled by her intellectual insight into the movements of the modern mind.

"Now an Englishwoman," she said, "would have only been aware of my existence as the daughter of the Earl of Marlington, but this American girl knows me because I was editor of the poor defunct 'Time Spirit.'"

Mr. Silas A. Todd, who did not possess his wife's acquaintance with Debrett, much to my amusement, insisted on addressing me as Lord Bailey-Martin. We were conversing at the time apart from the ladies.

"Although my wife is an earl's daughter," said I, with modest simplicity, "I am only a commoner, Mr. Todd."

"What, ain't you a lord?" said he, a little disappointed. "I was raised in Connecticut, and guess I've never spoken to a lord. Wall! I dare say you're none the worse for that, sir. May I ask what's your class?"

Then I perceived Mr. Todd had peculiar views of his own concerning social distinctions in England, which I fancy he believed was regulated in some manner incomprehensible to him by the railway companies, for when I informed him that, although untitled, I was an Oxford man, and naturally moved in the same society as my wife, he "guessed I travelled first class when aboard the train," a conjecture in which I acquiesced.

Mr. Silas A. Todd, in fact, had many amusing oddities, although he was as destitute of taste for art and nature as my brother Robert. Like many Americans, he had the faculty of admiring his wife in a purely impersonal manner, as though she belonged as much to the world at large as to himself.

Lady Gertrude and her new acquaintance soon became intimate. Mrs. Todd—who was known at home as Mimi Todd—either admired my wife's talent to excess or desired the support of her social influence in London, where she proposed to stay in the following sea-

son. We projected excursions with the Todds, shared a guide between us, picnicked amongst the pine-woods together. Mrs. Todd's vivacity and freedom from conventionality pleased my wife, who adopted towards her the air of a philosopher to a disciple.

The first day or two Gertrude spent in explaining her system of philosophy, of which Mimi Todd picked up the jargon with surprising speed. Silas and myself did not interfere much in these colloquies. He was impressed by my wife's wisdom, but still more impressed by his own wife's intelligence.

"Sir," he would exclaim, gravely, "ain't she bright! Boston don't hold a brighter. I guess she'll soon know all your good lady can teach. I ain't a college graduate myself, but I can admire intellect when I see it."

But to Mimi Todd's character there was another side besides the philosophic one. Although, like Solomon, she believed "wisdom was the principal" thing, she was not fashioned too ethereally for human nature's daily food. Her dresses were as dainty and coquettish as a Paris dressmaker could devise. Dark hair, clear bright eyes, and the reddest of red lips were hers. Sometimes when she philosophised you would think her half a saint, but the white satin of her skin shone through her diaphanous dresses. Then you perceived she was a woman to whom all the pleasant vanities of the world were dear. It was plain Silas's simple admiration did not quite satisfy the requirements of that vanity that is the necessary consequence of physical beauty. How could this kindly, thin-lipped, dyspeptic American, who had passed his life in a great dry-goods store in his native city, and grown rich as well as prematurely old, be expected to satisfy all the demands the mysterious entity we call a woman's heart de-

mands? Silas could cover his wife with diamonds, array her in Worth's loveliest "costooms," as he called them, in the frank accents of his native tongue. This, of course was, something—indeed, it was very much—but to her pleasure-loving nature it was not all sufficient. It may be pretty Mimi Todd loved philosophy well, but I am sure she loved still better something the world calls pleasure and the catechism of our Church forbids. At one side of her character—the philosophic side—she met my wife, at the other she met me. It was clever to face each way at once, like a two-faced deity, and pleased us both.

CHAPTER XX.

One day when we had arranged a picnic in the pine-woods with the Todds, my wife succumbed to a head-ache. The heat was great. The blue, unclouded weather that enwrapped the valley was delightful and languorous, but Lady Gertrude could not always face it, and on the day in question she lay in her darkened room, Clarkson bathing her head with *eau de cologne.* One shaft of light evaded the sun-blind and pierced the gloom. I can see that room still with the motes dancing in the bright streak, and hear in fancy yet the singing of the myriads of crickets in the sun-parched fields without.

"Cannot you join us, Gertrude?" I asked.

"I cannot," she said, "lift my head."

"Shall I stay with you, and let the Todds do their picnicking alone?"

"What do you think?" she asked—a little wistfully I thought.

"Of course," I said, "I would prefer to stay with you, but I invited these people to join us principally on your account. The man with the mules is here, and the Todds waiting to start. But I will do what you wish."

"Then go," said she, closing her eyes and succumbing to the lassitude that hemmed her in.

I do not think Mrs. Todd was entirely sorry my wife could not accompany us (although voluble in her expressions of regret and commiseration); perhaps she

had had enough for the present of "philosophy's sweet milk."

"If your wife can't come," said she, "I sha'n't bring Silas."

"That," said I, "would be only fair."

Silas was sucking contemptuously at a Swiss cigar, standing in the veranda of the hotel, which he called the piazza. The hot weather seemed to have parched him, for the skin of his face looked tighter and more arid than ever.

"Silas," said his wife, "you have letters to answer."

"I guess so," said he.

"Then answer your mail to-day. Lady Gertrude is sick, and you must stay here and look round till she comes down. Mr. Bailey-Martin and I will picnic alone."

"Well, don't get right atop of Mount Blank."

Silas Todd made no concessions to native pronunciation.

"I would not go up without you, Silas," said his wife, "for all the diamonds in Tiffany's store. But I know you don't want to sit on the melted snow, unless you're obliged. So you may consider yourself off duty. You are not eupeptic enough to eat cold fowl on the side of a mountain. Your last bottle of Duffy's Pepsine is finished. You ought to be very grateful to Mr. Bailey-Martin for taking me off your hands."

After having been swept across the Continent in his wife's train, an excursionless day was a luxury for Silas Todd.

"I thank you, sir," he said, "for your attention to Mrs. Todd, and I'll take a rest."

The harmless incident I am describing is, I know, out of harmony with the sentimental idea usually

associated with a honeymoon. But is the popular notion of it quite accurate? Probably, if the joys of honeymoons admitted of exact arithmetical statement, it would be found that not even one per cent. of them ever reached any extraordinary standard of bliss. I am sure Gertrude had enjoyed hers as much as most people, and I believe my own satisfaction had surpassed the average. We cannot always keep our sentiments at high pressure, and there are unfortunately few people like myself, willing to tell the truth about these things. If there were, how many fond delusions respecting love and marriage would have been corrected! How many young people of both sexes might have been spared disappointment. Let us uproot the foolish sentiment that leads the inexperienced to expect from matrimony any other advantages than the immediate material ones every well-regulated match must bring.

Some such thoughts as these naturally passed through my mind that torrid morning as I rode (behind the luncheon-basket) on an ill-groomed Chamounix mule up the straight dusty road towards the steep pine-woods and mountain pastures.

I did not understand the pretty American all at once. America is, I am told, especially proud of her psychological novelists. Some critics seem to think them the result of a national complacency that can only exist in extreme youth. Whether they are the natural outcome of a self-analysing people, or, reversing the order of incidents, whether the self-analysing heroes and heroines be the unconscious progenitors of the psychological young ladies and gentlemen of actual American existence, I will not pretend to decide. But since critics tell us Lord Byron's poems produced that pecu-

liar morbid mental condition known as "Byronism," it is not impossible the "psychology," of the New England school of writers should have set a large number of clever American women wondering at the complexity of their own mental machinery.

We turned away from the dusty road and followed a narrow path leading upwards. Gradually the air grew cooler, the pine trees more fragrant. Below us we could see the valley of Chamounix. Far above in the thin mountain air the cow-bells tinkled. We rode in single file, Mimi Todd leading the way. The light that fell on her through the green boughs of the trees made her seem more beautiful than perhaps she really was. Gleaming from above me in her white dress through the shadows of the boughs as the winding path separated us, she had lost for the moment that air of artificiality delicate and scrupulously dressed women too often possess. Every twist to a curl, every adjustment of a ribbon or rose, has an object. Pretty Mrs. Mimi Todd had been "manicured," "pedicured," and "massaged" to perfection. No single iota in her physical attractiveness had missed cultivation. Pretty American women fight against wrinkles with more energy than most of us combat—what shall I say—sin? Beauty after all consists of two sorts: there is the raw material and the manufactured article. Men generally say they prefer the raw material, but their conduct somewhat belies them. Women, I believe, like the manufactured article best, and too often underrate the "raw material" as lacking in style. But after all the primitive instincts in men are never quite silent. They wake in the hot sun and stir at the breath of spring.

This idea was dimly exercising my brain when we

reached our destination—a mountain meadow somewhere near the "*Pierre Pointu.*" We dismounted and sat upon the grass.

"How we revert to nature," said I, "on days like these."

"The hot sun draws out our atavisms," she answered. "I guess you are a Darwinian, like your wife."

We opened the lunch basket and uncorked the champagne, whilst the guide sat down at a respectful distance, contemplating us.

Mimi, who had been "raised," as her husband would have said, amongst New England Teetotallers rarely drank champagne. It made her bright eyes sparkle, and increased her more than American candour.

"I am glad to see you alone, Mr. Bailey-Martin; you interest me."

"Shall I," I suggested, "send on the man with the mules?"

"I guess he can't understand English."

"To be sure not. I forgot. But how do I interest you?"

"I don't understand you—yet. I have taken Lady Gertrude's measure. She is not without complication, but you are not like any American" (she said American with a delicate little twirl of the *r* that escapes all phonetic representation I am acquainted with) "I have met. You are a new type. New types interest me."

"Do you like me?" I asked looking into her sparkling eyes *avec intention*, as the French say.

"No, I cannot admit that. You are well 'set up,' as you say in England, dress well, and are pleasant to look at. You interest me most because I can't understand you. Your motives are obscure, your thoughts incomprehensible."

When she said she did not like me I did not believe her.

"But," said I, "I am a very open book to read. What don't you understand?"

"First of all, I cannot understand how you and Lady Gertrude came to be married. You are not well matched physically or mentally. That sounds impertinent, I know. You Englishmen are so reticent. Reticence is one of your forms of hypocrisy. Let us, this one hot afternoon, live in a Palace of Truth. It will be a good tonic for you."

"In a Palace of Truth!" I exclaimed, smiling; "I have lived in one all my life."

"Then you have lived alone in it. No one else has been admitted."

"You shall be admitted to-day. Mrs. Silas A. Todd, otherwise Mimi, you are a very beautiful woman."

"That is a somewhat clumsy statement of what is only partly true. Mr. Bailey-Martin, I wish to know how it is you and Lady Gertrude married? I am a psychologist. Science, not curiosity, speaks."

"Because we wished it. Like yourself, I worship talent. I was editor of the 'Time Spirit.'"

"Now defunct, I guess. Its death followed close on your wedding."

"Yes, for so it seemed good to the Fates. Well, the paper brought us together. You can guess the rest, it has been a union of souls."

"Your Palace of Truth," she answered, "is a roofless structure."

"Let me test your own building," said I. "You and your husband seem to a superficial observer still more physically and mentally uncongenial than we are. In

fact he is the sort of excuse French novelists find for pretty wives."

Mimi winced, coloured slightly, then smiled.

"You think I need consolation. I will tell Silas. He would like to know. He has been too busy all his life for any savage instinct to survive in his nature."

"If he suffered from the atavisms we spoke of just now, he would cudgel you to death."

"Yes, I guess so."

"You mean he is not jealous?"

"Why should he be? Is Lady Gertrude jealous?"

"My wife is a philosopher. Besides, she has no cause."

"You mean you have had no time to give her one. Come, Mr. Bailey-Martin, let us sweep away the cobwebs."

Well, we swept them away. Indeed it was a strange talk we two had in that high mountain meadow, whilst the guide munched the lunch we had left. I confess Mimi made me forget I was on my honeymoon, as I expect she intended. Gradually we shifted our ground to a sort of platonic plane, where we could talk of things usually left untouched in conversation between young men and women. It was for me a piquant experience. But to discuss life and the relation of the sexes from the stand-point of evolution and materialism, even with the utmost reticence of phrase, has its dangers.

There was something at once provocative and repellant in Mimi's attitude towards me, peculiarly tantalizing, that made the presence of the sunburnt guide irksome. Before we rose to return, whilst the man was seeing to his mules, I confess I kissed Mimi's soft cheek just below the ear. No, there was not an explo-

sion. Mimi was not a Lucrece from Boston. I will swear she weighed that ghost of a kiss in the balance of her psychological scale.

"Now," she said, triumphantly, "I know why you married Lady Gertrude. I half pity her, too, in spite of that 'union of souls' the 'Time Spirit' cemented. But no more experiments: it is time to go back."

"I am only a very human man," said I, helping her to mount her mule, "and no philosopher like Gertrude and you."

Just before reaching Chamounix we met Mr. Todd and my wife. They were walking arm-in-arm, he bending over her figure with a kindly expression in his thin face shrouded by his white panama hat.

"My lady's headache being better, sir," said he, "I indooced her to come with me to meet you and Mimi. A pleasant excursion?"

"I guess we've had just a lovely time in the woods," said Mimi; "and if Lady Gertrude had been there it would have been perfect."

CHAPTER XXI.

It was fated that evening to obtain an accidental glimpse into my wife's private thoughts before dinner. Going up to our private room I found her keys lying beside a locked diary. Scarcely thinking what I was doing, I fitted in the smallest, and opened the book.

It was filled with a strange jumble of philosophic and romantic musings. Often my own name appeared in the pages with tender allusions. Discontented and lonely before her marriage, she anticipated happiness from it, which I regret to say she did not realize. Turning quickly to the pages following it I read:

"More confessions of a troubled spirit. He let the 'Time Spirit' die. He never knows when I am ill. What comfort in the 'O, you'll be all right'—his habitual phrase? He is absorbed in his own pleasures. Does a woman love like that? Yet I desire to have him about me. As I write these lines he is up in the pine wood with the Americans. Three weeks of marriage to-day! Thus we seek happiness but never find it. Joy only exists in the imagination. Who knows? I may be loved as much as other women. I ask too much."

There was little philosophy here. The lines might have been written by the merest schoolgirl. For once

I beheld, as it were, my wife's mind in undress. I always knew she was one of those women who would never be happy. More than half our happiness is of entirely physical origin, and its centre situated in the stomach. But poor Gertrude was not the first woman who has attributed to her husband's selfishness what was in reality the result of her own dyspepsia. The devil is in it! When my wife is ill her discontented voice always grates on my nerves. Now if, like Gertrude, I had entrusted my thoughts to the ruled lines of a diary, you would have read, "I wish to goodness my wife would not whine!"

"Thrift, thrift, Horatio," is an excellent quality in a housewife, but one does not care to see it displayed in excess by a lady of noble birth.

My wife possessed another clasped and locked book, the companion volume to the diary, over which I had seen her poring with a pained absorption on her face. At first I did not know the object of this precious volume. You would never guess! It contained elaborate statistics of our expenditure—at least of as much of it as I allowed her to see. By consulting it she could tell you the average price of "bourgeois" all over Switzerland, and what was the lowest fee you could offer a chambermaid or a concierge without inflicting an insult on the recipient.

After dinner that evening, for the first time she discussed the expenses of our honeymoon in a way that would have made a romantic young man's blood run cold.

"Had you an idea," she said, "travelling was so expensive?"

I had not asked her to pay, but at her request handed over to her keeping the various hotel bills, which she

docketed and tabulated with the dexterity of a statistician.

"Not the slightest," I said, "sixty pounds perhaps."

"Two thousand and forty-five francs fifty centimes, exclusive of travelling expenses. Our bill for champagne amounts to 252 francs. Dr. Johnson has described music as the most expensive form of noise. Travelling is, undoubtedly, the most costly form of fatigue."

Gertrude used to joke in this ponderous manner.

"You'll get used to the fatigue. Why not get used to the expense too?"

"Of course I know, Percival, when people are first married they are naturally a little lavish. But do you not think we have been married long enough for a little reasonable economy. Extravagance is very uncivilized."

"And parsimony," I retorted, "is very barbarous."

People have odd notions about extravagance and economy. Gertrude was willing to squander hundreds on the idiotic "Time Spirit," but a few francs on champagne made her wince. It is true she could only drink one small glass, whilst she was able to absorb whole columns of the "Time Spirit" without any ill effect.

"Perhaps," I said, "you would like to stay at a Pension. There are places where they take you in at five francs a day on the *tout compris* scale."

"I think the arrangement a reasonable one," she replied, under the impression I was in earnest.

Fancy an earl's daughter wishing to stay at a five-francs-a-day boarding-house! Do not tell me marriage has no surprises after that.

Now I never consider anything extravagant so long

as it gives me pleasure. But I hate to see money wasted over silly whims. There was the difference between us. But I did not endeavour to argue with her then.

You will perhaps think from my candour in criticising my wife's character, that I was disappointed in my marriage before the honeymoon was over. But this is not quite the case. When we have striven ardently to win anything and have obtained it, the object does not generally possess all the value in our eyes that we originally attributed to it. The dignity of my wife's position threw lustre on mine. Directly English tourists discovered who we were, they paid us that subtle homage the middle class, perhaps unconsciously, render to rank. This was gratifying. But as I grew used to it the edge was taken off the charm, although, having once received it, I could not have dispensed with it without intense social discomfort. But though necessary it ceased to add appreciably to my joy in living. The worth of some possessions can only be measured by the desire to which their absence would give activity. This soon became the case with me after my marriage. But why should I endeavour to excuse myself because my sentiments towards Gertrude were entirely within the limits of reason? A man who falls down and adores his wife as a paragon of all the virtues, and because he has ceased to be a bachelor, imagines other women have no longer any interest for him, is a human type, for which I, for one, feel an aversion. Can such a man be considered perfectly rational? Marriages of this sort cannot be perfectly happy, because they are not based on common sense. The brief glimpse I have given of my wife's diary, shows you even she was a little disillusioned,

and you know how much she cared for me. No, no, the truth is always best. Is it not wiser to recognise it, than to dwell in a paradise of fools, objects of ridicule for all reasonable people. It makes me sick to see a man admiring a commonplace woman as a sort of divinity, who has come down from high Olympus for his sake. The fatuous adoration of a confiding wife for her husband, is almost equally painful to me. It makes me sad. I know what human nature is, I see what in their particular case they believe it to be. What a gulf between fact and fancy have we here! In a very highly civilised community no honest man will permit a woman to worship him in this credulous fashion. It is immoral. You will remember the candour of my conduct to Edith Lyall. You have seen my absolute frankness to my wife—after we were married. Could Mimi Todd have possibly misunderstood me? Ah, no; let us be honest. Men and women are as nature moulded them. Let them acquiesce in her laws and leave all the posing to the heroes and heroines of novels written for school-girls.

We need excitement and must find it where we can. A man does not generally obtain enough of it in the bosom of his own family. The desire of it I take to be a sign of vitality.

Some such reflections as these passed through my mind as I sat smoking on the balcony of our room.

In the summer night outside, the moon was gilding the jagged *aiguilles* of the Mount Blanc range; behind me, under the shadow of the lamp, my wife was busy with her accounts.

CHAPTER XXII.

How strange are the ways of women! I naturally endeavoured to renew the innocent flirtation I had commenced with Mrs. Todd, but I found she could change her moods as easily as her raiment. The day following our picnic she unhesitatingly rejected the tepid atmosphere of platonic sympathy that had so naturally established itself between us. But I understood Mimi's tricks. She did not wish to arouse my wife's jealousy. The pretty American intended, when she came to England, Lady Gertrude should help her into the exalted society that is so dear to the female side of republican simplicity. Yes, yes, Mrs. Mimi, I knew how your little brain worked. You were not the woman to throw away a chance. I know you said to yourself: "If I set this woman's back up I shall be snubbed when I come to London." But though Mimi shifted her ground I stood on mine.

We were sitting in the veranda, pretending to look at the view, Mimi rocking herself in a chair, admiring instead the points of her little shoes under the lace fringe of an elaborate petticoat.

"You have forgotten yesterday afternoon," I said. "I wish I had your memory." I had been urging her to arrange another picnic with me alone. My wife, I explained, could not stand the heat, Silas might easily

be induced to stay behind. Why not be happy together —innocently happy! once more, up in the cool meadows and scented pine woods. But she was not to be tempted, and laughed at my flattery.

"Hush, Mr. Bailey-Martin, hush," she said. "Be you the bashful gallant, I will be the Lady with the colder breast than snow. You don't want Gian's stylet through your back—Silas here standing for Gian. I guess we know our Browning in Boston!"

I would defy Don Juan himself to flirt with a woman who quotes Browning at him, especially when he does not understand the reference.

The idea of old Silas being jealous! There was no more jealousy in him than in a withered leaf.

"Your husband," said I, "is far too sensible to be jealous. Besides, he believes you're an angel."

I did not mean to sneer.

"If you are determined to be rude," she replied, "I will go and talk to Lady Gertrude." And thereupon she left me and went to our sitting-room to talk philosophy with my wife.

That evening brought the Todds a telegram, calling them back to America ten days earlier than they expected. Silas was pleased, but not Mimi. She took an affectionate leave of my wife. "Write to me, Lady Gertrude," she said, plaintively; "I need your guidance."

She was half in earnest too. Of course my wife would write, and Mrs. Todd must come and stay in London with us in May.

So we parted, and when pretty Mimi was gone I confess Chamounix began to bore me. There was nothing to amuse us—except ourselves. It was at this point in our married life that, according to Gertrude's diary, she

commenced "to make the first serious study of my character."

There were, I must tell you, two keys to this volume. Accident placed one in my hands, and I thought it well to keep it. Theoretically it may have been a questionable act, but as it enabled me (when I chose) to add to my wife's happiness by unexpectedly anticipating her wishes, I think you will allow there are practical compensations for any moral deficiencies. Many men offend their wives, without knowing it, twenty times a day. The knowledge I was thus enabled to obtain of the idiosyncrasies of mine enabled me to spare her innumerable little annoyances as well as to keep her eccentricities within reasonable bounds. But this autobiography is a plain, unvarnished tale, nor have I time to dwell on the fretful fancies that may have harassed me on my honeymoon. We naturally turn to the early days of marriage because of the great gulf that separates them from the bachelor existence immediately preceding them. Men are never weary of inwardly weighing the advantages of one state against those of the other. They rarely tell us, except in obvious cases of matrimonial failure, which they find the happier. From Chamounix we went to Ouchy for a fortnight, and then, tired of continental travelling, we returned to England and spent a week at Surbiton. Some men who had married as I have done, would have hesitated to bring his wife into his family circle more than was absolutely necessary. But Gertrude got on fairly well with my people. "There should be," she said, "no social distinctions except intellectual ones."

My father and mother flattered her, and I think she liked them in a pitying sort of way.

It is not in human nature to reject the advances of those people who increase our self-esteem.

Every one Gertrude met in my father's house treated her whims with the deference foolishness always meets with in high places. It was a pleasing spectacle to see her unfolding her favourite scheme of constructing a new religion from the ethics of Christianity and the dregs of Buddhism to Bob, whilst he listened in silent, uncomprehending reverence. My father and mother were spared these philosophic conferences, as being past the "malleable period of intellectual life."

It was not quite flattering to me to find Gertrude more contented in the bosom of my family than alone with me in Switzerland. She could resume again the voluminous correspondence with all manner of people in which she delighted, that the excitement preceding and following our marriage had interrupted.

Before our marriage she had seen in me a convert to her variegated philosophy; but a closer intimacy convinced her of what she was pleased to call our "mental divergence." The "want of intellectual sympathy," of which she complains in her diary with tedious reiteration, seems to have disappointed her. But how simple is the explanation! The exigencies of courtship do not allow a man to criticise his wife's opinions with candour. He finds it easier and more profitable to acquiesce in them. This little exhibition of human weakness on my part made her misunderstand my character, and it was not until the collapse of the "Time Spirit" that she formed a better estimate of it. Now many of Gertrude's theories were interesting, a few ingenious, but not one could possibly help me.

At last they bored me till I could no longer conceal it.

From Surbiton we went to the seaside for a few

weeks, and in the autumn settled down in my wife's house at Kensington.

I could now set to work seriously at the business of life again, and I turned to politics as the natural outlet for my energies.

At first a seat in the House of Commons seems a long way off to a young man with no political connections. But I was not discouraged. When I looked at the list of Members and traced their origin and progress upwards, I perceived advantages in my favour.

Gertrude wisely encouraged me in this idea. She fancied that if ever I got into the House she would have, indirectly, a voice in the future legislation of the country, and it suited me to encourage the idea.

But, oh for the lost Marlington interest! If it could have been secured how invaluable it would have been!

Righton House is two miles from Dichester, and until the Reform Bill the ancestors of my wife had selected the borough member. But these days had gone by. Dichester had increased in population and importance: a great boot and shoe manufactory had grown up and opulently flourished. Diggs's boots are famous for cheapness and rottenness all over the world. At the period to which I refer an aged member of the Diggs family represented the borough in the Conservative interest. An effete person of much apathy, exceeding wealth, and rapidly failing health, he had beaten the Marlington candidate by a few votes. The earl, my father-in-law, was a Liberal, Liberalism, or rather Whiggism, being a tradition in that noble family.

My wife's father had sworn himself into an attack of gout at the slight the town had cast on his family, and withdrawn all his subscriptions from the local charities. The resignation of the present member was

imminent, owing to his failing health. The chances of a Conservative being re-elected were small. Labour quarrels had deprived the Diggs family of their popularity, and the seat was ready to fall into the hands of any enterprising Liberal who could secure the Marlington interest. Who had a greater right to it than the man who had married the daughter of the House! Alas! these painful family estrangements. But Gertrude, although she earnestly desired to see me member for Dichester, refused to take any steps towards reconciliation and pointed to the letter her father had addressed to her as a reason.

Why not try and win the seat in spite of him? Righton might be induced to help me. At all events it was worth my while to nurse the constituency. It was one needing wooing, and my wife who knew the place and the people undertook to help me.

In the middle of November we opened the campaign.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In the picturesque High Street of Dichester stands an old, time-stained hostelry called the "White Hart." Above the arched entrance to the courtyard, dimly discerned, can be seen the Righton arms, two spears crossed over an owl's head, with the motto *Tout droit*, Righton, from whence the family name is derived.

It was kept by an ex-butler of the Earl's. In my boyhood, when I had been a guest at the house in the absence, as I have said, of the Earl and Countess, Bennett had taken me under his especial protection. More than one wet afternoon have I spent, not disagreeably, in his pantry, watching him polish the silver, and listening to the many stories he had to tell (not always to their credit), of the various members of the aristocracy who, in the younger days of his master, used to visit at the then great house.

"But what with my lady being so straight-laced," he used to say, "and my lord having such a weakness for the fair sex, we left off entertaining."

In compliance with the wishes of my father, I invariably gave Bennett two pounds whenever I stayed with the school-fellow destined to become my future brother-in-law, a gift he duly appreciated. I was, he said, "quite the gentleman," and being a kindly-natured man he occasionally condescended to take part in my juvenile sports when, owing to his habitual lethargy,

Righton left me to my own resources for my amusement.

Bennett had saved money and married the woman who had come into the Marlington family as nurse to Lady Gertrude, and who, when her services were no longer required, had gradually developed into a sort of un-official housekeeper. This alliance was entered into without the knowledge or consent of Lady Marlington. It was, I believe, owing to natural causes that she discovered it. They had, she told them, grossly deceived her, and she could therefore dispense with their services. The happy pair withdrew from the seclusion of Righton House to the publicity of the "White Hart," the good-will of which he purchased cheaply from an incompetent predecessor. They had prospered in Dichester. Bennett had acquired some considerable house property. His affluence and popularity were so great that the burgesses of the place wished him to be mayor. But he rejected the honour. He had aristocratic notions. That an ex-butler should blossom into a mayor was not, in his opinion, consistent with propriety. So another mayor, at his suggestion, was chosen, his very good friend the local sadler, who also possessed a tan-yard.

When we were married Mr. and Mrs. Bennett sent us a handsome silver pap-bowl, of which we have, unfortunately, never had any use. In her way Gertrude was fond of her old nurse, to whom she annually sent a sixpenny Christmas card, "with Gertrude's love."

The Bennetts, who had now been associated with Dichester for fifteen years, were exactly the right sort of allies needed in nursing a constituency.

The rumour, which proved to be unfounded, that Mr Diggs, M.P., was suffering from a slight attack of

paralysis, induced us to go down to Dichester and stay at the "White Hart." For the doors of her family-seat were sternly closed against my wife.

The unsentimental view Gertrude took of the matter was almost painful to my feelings. We drove from the station in the brougham Bennett had sent to meet us, and saw in the distance the square walls of Righton House rising above the sodden tree-tops on that dull November day.

"I should be sorry to stay there," she said, glancing towards it without a sign of feeling; "it never agreed with me. It is too damp."

Bennett received us with a sort of patronizing respect, which I perceived would need checking.

"Glad to see you, sir, I'm sure," he said, shaking the hand I offered, "strange things do happen, to be sure. Fancy now you marryin' Lady Gertrude. But I'm a Lib'ral—a true Lib'ral—and, though surprisin', these things are all right when you get used to them. But how the classes do get mixed up now-a-days. You'll scarcely credit it, but they acshually arst me to be their mayor. But at all events I knew my place. But I must say, sir, you're grown an uncommon fine-looking gentleman."

This whilst his wife was conducting Lady Gertrude to the rooms that had been prepared.

You will perceive that, though a Liberal in politics, Bennett was unconsciously a supporter of class exclusiveness. He knew all about the "Oloptic" and the Bailey-Martins' connection with trade, and my alliance with the ancient family he had served filled him with a sort of amazement.

"And you, Bennett, don't look a day older since I last saw you at Righton House. I heard all about the

honour Dichester wished to do you and of your modesty. I have come down here on political business, Bennett, and want your help."

And I told him what my plans were.

"You won't get the Marlington interest," said he. "My Lord was dead against the marriage, and swore dreadful when he heard about it. He's staying at the House now with two or three ladies of whom least said soonest mended. He don't get no better, on'y shakier, savager and wickerder as he grows older. Still, with all his faults, he's one o' the old school."

"Then," said I, "as my esteemed father-in-law has quarrelled with everybody his support may not be as invaluable as you suppose. But I shall call on him to-morrow."

"Call on him!" echoed Bennett in surprise. "Well! you *are* a good plucked un!"

It was in reality Bennett's manner which made me take this resolution. The ex-butler evidently looked at the old Earl of Marlington as a sort of thundering, cloud-compelling, local Jupiter, to be propitiated with the burnt-offerings of obsequious respect, and not as an irritable gout-afflicted old reprobate to be bearded in his own country-seat. I had only seen the Earl once at the lodge gates when I was a boy staying at Righton House. I was clearing out just as he was coming in. He had merely asked who "the deuce" I was, and driven on without taking the trouble to look at me when informed of my identity. Righton, who was accompanying me to the station, had endeavored to smuggle me out of the place without meeting his father who, he remarked, with an air of relief, "was not a bit waxy after all." This incident, half forgotten now, recurred to my mind.

"The truth is, Bennett," said I, "some one ought to tell Lord Marlington the truth. Lord Righton always funked his father, my wife misunderstood him. When I have a duty to do, I do it. To-morrow afternoon I intend to ask him for his political support in the borough, should it become vacant."

The little plump man looked up admiringly at my six feet.

"Well, sir," said he, "he can't eat you, and so long as you don't mind being sworn at there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Besides, Bennett," I continued, "it is exceedingly unpleasant to me to find my father-in-law disgracing, at his time of life, the family into which I have married. My whole future as a statesman might be blighted by it. In certain political quarters I have suffered already. To be son-in-law of Lord Marlington carries anything but credit. I am tired of being asked why I cannot keep him in order." And I frowned at Bennett over the glass of sherry and bitters he had provided. He was impressed, as I had intended he should be. There was no more talking about the mixing of the classes now. A determined manner and a cool head can do much with people like Bennett, who are sent into the world, no doubt for an all-wise purpose, to "carry trenchers," and respect their betters.

I told my wife of my intention to call on her father whilst we were dressing for dinner.

"There will," she said, "only be a scene. Briggs—Mrs. Bennett I mean—assures me the servants tell her he has become more violent than ever."

"It will do your father good," I replied, "to meet a man who is not afraid of him."

But on the following day, when I was face-to-face with my purpose and the brougham waiting before the "White Hart," to carry me to Righton House, I confess I felt a trifle uneasy. I was going, in the first place, on my wife's account, as a herald of peace. We had discussed the matter half through the night, and at last she had been persuaded that "for the sake of my political future," it might be well "to eat a little humble-pie."

Bennett was much interested and amused, taking a sort of sporting interest in the forthcoming encounter. Gertrude I think admired my courage. She had come to look on her father as though he were a kind of modern Cenci. "He had commenced his abandoned career," she had told me, "to annoy his pious and evangelical wife, and ended in finding it so suited to his tastes that he continued it for his personal gratification after it had driven her out of the house." Truly I had married into an amiable family!

I lit a cigar at the ancient bar where Bennett used to sit like a local King Cole, patronizing his fellow-townsmen. My battle of Austerlitz must be fought. The chances of obtaining a victory were small. The Earl might refuse to see me.

"Not he," replied Bennett to this suggestion. "Too much fight in 'im for that. He'll 'ave yer into his private room and blackguard yer, or 'ave a go at yer before his ladies, satiric-like, his fav'rite game."

But I smiled on him with an indifference I did not feel, and as I left heard him mutter to his wife that I was a "cool 'and." Yet I was, I confess, a little nervous at the prospect, and kept up my courage by explaining to myself that Lord Marlington after all could only be very insulting. At most we could only have a row.

He could not wound my feelings more than he had already done by his brutal letter to my wife. If he were not to be propitiated by a dove bearing the olive-branch of peace, I had decided to give him what servants call "a bit of my mind."

"After all, Percival, my boy," said I encouragingly, as the iron gates came into sight, "it is not so bad as a visit to the dentist;" still, I think it was something like it.

As I entered the long drive on the pale autumn day, under the half-bared branches, I wished the beach-tree avenue longer.

Righton House, re-built in the reign of George II., is a big barrack-like structure with a great number of rooms, and no signs of architectural beauty. All the window panes seemed frowning at me, and the great doors looked like the jaws of some sullen monster, that cannot open without a hungry snap. How loud the bell rang! Yes, I certainly was nervous. The coachman waiting to drive me back, tried to look as though he did not know why I had come. The door opened, and in the glass door behind I saw my face. Thank goodness, it did not show the faintest trace of emotion! My frock coat hung faultlessly from my square shoulders, my trousers did not show a wrinkle.

"Lord Marlington at home?" said I. "Tell him Mr. Bailey-Martin wishes to see him."

I saw by the footman's face he had heard my name before.

He showed me into a very long drawing-room with two fireplaces, only one of which was alight, and then left me. The scheme of decoration was yellow, the chairs yellow; outside the day was yellowing too.

But the servant entered. "My Lord," he said, "would

not believe it was you, and told me to ask for your card."

I gave it to him. "Tell Lord Marlington," said I, "there is no mistake."

Then the man returned again.

"My Lord will see you in the boudoir," he said, with a faint grin on his shaven face.

I followed him down a long passage, till, opening an unexpected door, he ushered me into one of those rooms usually associated with young and frivolous married women—one of those rooms which irritated my wife, "false in art," I am quoting her—"and false in taste."

The rose-pink curtains were drawn, a tall lamp lighted; sitting just beyond its shaded rays was the Earl, my father-in-law; beyond that, more dimly descried, two ladies.

Leaning back lazily in his arm-chair with a bald gray head, and an aquiline nose over a white mustache, Lord Marlington somehow reminded me of a wicked Earl in a *Family Herald* story. His legs were long and thin, and his waist in circumference out of proportion to his otherwise thin figure. The door closed behind me, and I stood waiting for him to say something, but, he merely stared in silence, waiting, I suppose, for me to begin. Bennett was right. The Earl meant to have a go at me before the ladies.

I sat down uninvited, wondering, whilst I nursed my hat, how I should begin.

"You have, as far as you know, never seen me, Lord Marlington," I commenced at last, "although I have the honour to be nearly allied to your family by marriage."

"You didn't come here to tell me of your domestic

arrangements. They have no interest for me. What do you want?"

"Simply reconciliation."

At this a titter from the gloom, but a strangely familiar one.

"You are making these young friends of mine laugh," he said.

"So I perceive," said I; "but as the conversation I wish to have with you concerns only ourselves, perhaps you will allow me to see you in private."

I intended to speak with crushing dignity. It caused the laugh to be repeated with greater carelessness. I glanced in the direction of it, and, wonder of wonders! beheld an old friend, shall I say flame? St. Claire, the pretty long-skirt dancer of the Frivolity. I had introduced Righton to her, and now she was on a visit to his father. I burst out in wonder, all my dignity quenched in astonishment.

"Cissie, who on earth expected to see you here?"

She exploded into a downright vulgar upheaval of unrestrained mirth.

"What dignity, Pur,"—she always insisted on calling me Pur—like Bob did, "and what diplomacy! You missed your vocation: you ought to go on the stage." I paid no attention to her, but watched the face of my father-in-law.

He looked like a fiend, and the veins in his forehead were swelling dangerously. Cissie saw the fierce glare in his pale bloodshot eyes—eyes wickedly like my wife's: "Let's cut it," she said to her friend; "there's going to be a family row, let 'em fight it out alone." So saying, the two ladies gleefully hurried out of the room, leaving us alone.

"What an odd meeting," said I, in sheer amazement.

"D——d odd, sir," said the Earl, jumping from his chair.

"As odd as you please, sir," said I, rising too.

My blood was up, and I was not afraid of a whole wilderness of Earls.

He opened fire. A broadside a bargee might have envied. I was an adjectived son of an adjectived shopkeeper; his three-barrelled adjective of a daughter was only fit for a criminal lunatic asylum for marrying such a low-bred cockney cad. Yet I must not forget he was my father-in law. Why should I show him to you in all his naked ferocity? If I had flinched, I believe he would have struck me, but I was two inches taller than he, and I fancy he must have seen something in my eyes to daunt him, for no one likes to be called a low-bred cockney cad, with all imaginary adjectival qualifications.

But at last he stopped for want of breath, and throwing himself back into his arm-chair, further utterance was arrested by a violent fit of coughing.

"Now, you have finished, my Lord," I said, "perhaps you will let me tell you why I have come here."

"Why! to lick the blacking off my boots," he roared, springing to his feet again. "Get out of my house!" Then he tugged the bell.

"When your daughter said you were a ruffian," I answered, savage at last, "she spoke the truth."

The right side of his face flickered with a savagely contorted grin, and his white false teeth flashed out prominently for a moment under his grey moustache. A grin to remember, scarcely human looking.

The servant entered.

"See this fellow out, and never let him come in again."

The old brute was as unapproachable as a grisly bear, so I left him.

This was the only interview with my wife's father I ever had.

In the hall Cissie St. Claire met me.

"How did it go off?" she asked, laughing mischievously.

"Papa-in-law," said I, "is nearly apoplectic with rage. Go and console him, my dear. He needs it."

"If you've upset him," she replied, "I shall go back to town. But I daresay it will be amusing to hear him abusing you, although they do tell me now you are married you have also reformed, Master Pur. I hope your repentance is sincere. But don't come here again and interrupt the domestic bliss of other people. Stay away and enjoy your own."

And so Cissie capered around me, laughing derisively at the situation; and, as I descended the wide steps the ballet-girl waved me an adieu from the seat of the ancient Righton family.

"Ta-ta! Pur, ta-ta!"

I drove away musing. The battle was over. It had been a victory for Lord Marlington. He had turned me out of the house. But I had learnt one thing. This fierce, inflamed old gentleman could not keep his son out of the title much longer. Upon my honour I believe he was jealous, and that if Cissie had not been there I could have got over him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When I told my wife what manner of reception mine had been, she did not exactly say "I told you so," for that would have been too commonplace for the refinement of phrase she cultivated, but the four words epitomized her remarks on the subject. Bennett was curious to know the result of our interview, but I did not gratify him. His experience as mine host of the White Hart, had not obliterated habits acquired as a footman, and the earlier training prevented him from openly questioning me.

"Our interview," I said, "was a painful one, but I do not think the Earl of Marlington will easily forget it. Politically I can count on him. Other relations I have no desire to cultivate."

You see I was compelled to give a diplomatic account of the interview.

Bennett insisted on waiting on us at dinner, and stood solemnly behind my chair. I think he expected to pick up something interesting from our conversation, but I turned it in the direction of my wife's book, "The Evolution of Conduct," then at Chapter II. on the "relation of instinct to morals."

In vain he filled my glass with champagne and my wife's with soda-water. When Gertrude is once started on her hobbies she is not easily diverted from her course. I still remember how earnestly she demon-

strated that cannibalism, as practised by the tribes in the Congo Forests, far from being technically immoral, is merely a very striking example of obedience to the law of necessity, linked to atavistic propensity. But I will spare you her arguments. I do not think, from the expression of Bennett's face, they could have been popularly convincing. Still, however specious they may have been, they showed an extreme freedom from conventional prejudice.

I had arranged next morning with Bennett to call on some of the leading tradespeople, and his friend the Mayor, with a view of ascertaining how far they might be willing to accept me as their candidate, when the unexpected incident Providence so often contrives altered my plans.

It was after breakfast, about half-past ten. The rain was pouring steadily, the High Street tesselated with muddy puddles. I stood at the door watching a horseman in a gleaming mackintosh splashing along at a high rate of speed and excitement. "Some one to fetch a doctor," thought I with a certain sense of satisfaction that it was not my fate to obey the summons of any fractious invalid with a bad liver.

He pulled up, however, opposite the door of the White Hart, leaving his horse, smoking in the humid atmosphere like a damp chimney, to the care of a lad groping with a stick in a blocked-up gutter, and hastily mounted the steps, bearing a letter.

"A note for you, sir," said he, handing me a damp envelope.

It was in Cissie's writing.

What could she want?

I opened the clammy envelope.

"DEAR PUR—We were pals once, and I never forget pals; so I drop you a line which, unless I'm mistaken, will be useful. The Earl, poor old chap, has just had a sort of stroke.

"They've sent for the doctor, telegraphed for Lady Marlington to Bath, but as it has occurred to no one else, the duty of writing to his son-in-law has devolved on me. Gussie and I are off to town by the first train. This place is just too awful. Look me up at the old address and remember to say thank you. You'll be minister some day, my boy, or I'm not

"Your old pal,

"CISSIE ST. CLAIRE."

Then I remembered the old man's twisted mouth.

The groom stood waiting whilst I read the letter.

"My Lord's had some sort of fit," he said, in answer to my looks. "Must have took him in the night. His man found him caught up all a' one side when he carried up his chocolate. Miss St. Claire told me to give you that note."

Bennett came to join us as we stood on the doormat. When he heard what had occurred he said, "Gor' bless my soul!" several times.

"I want the brougham," said I. "Lady Gertrude and I must drive over to Righton House at once."

I found my wife busy with her manuscripts. "Your father's had a fit or something of the sort," said I. "A groom has galloped over to say so."

"A fit?" she asked, "what sort of fit?"

"The man said a fit or a stroke of some kind."

"How inaccurate these people are!"

"You can't expect the servants to make a careful diagnosis," said I irritably. "They have only just

discovered it, and the doctor had not arrived when the messenger started. Get ready at once. The brougham's ordered, our proper place is at Righton House. Your brother 's in America—your mother at Bath. For all we know your father may be dead before we get there."

"That depends on the nature of his attack," she said, carefully placing the pages of her manuscript in a portfolio.

I was more moved and excited than she, and commenced at once to change the light suit I wore for a black one, as better fitting an occasion of gravity.

"Did they write?" she asked.

"No, sent a verbal message."

Whilst she was methodically buttoning her boots, I ran downstairs to send off the groom before she could see him. The Bennetts were regaling him with rum-and-water and eager gossip.

"Go back and tell the housekeeper," said I, authoritatively, "Lady Gertrude and I are coming at once." I gave him half a sovereign.

"Ah," said Mrs. Bennett, "he'll never get over it. Doctors can't do anything for those strokes. Poor Lord Marlington, all down his left side, they tell me." Mrs. Bennett was cheerfully depressed.

She sighed, but found in the excitement a compensation for the dull, wet day. Her husband was, I am sure, conjecturing how Lord Righton's coming into the title could affect his interests.

"I did a great deal for the Earl of Marlington in my younger days, sir."

"Well, I daresay he has remembered it in his will."

He shook his head in a resigned, self-satisfied regret.

"Not he, sir, not he. Still it's a consolation to know you've done yer duty."

"I have always found it a great one, Bennett, but here's the brougham."

Then Gertrude came down in a long sealskin jacket, calm but thoughtful. Her old nurse whimpered over her a little, in the perfunctory manner of upper-servants whose sympathies have been purchased. My wife accepted it as a matter of course.

"I daresay my father will get over it," she said.

"Never, my lady, never."

But I hurried her into the brougham, and we started.

"You take it pretty calmly," said I.

"It is twelve years since I saw my father," she replied, "then he swore me out of the house. Since I have had one letter from him."

I knew the one to which she referred.

"I hope," she continued, "you do not wish me to assume a grief I cannot possibly feel. It is the most vulgar form of affectation."

I did not wish to say anything rude, so held my peace. But before we entered the lodge gates, I impressed upon her the duty of exerting her authority.

"Till your mother comes, you must be mistress," I said.

The clouds had fallen lower, and the rain changed into a penetrating mist.

"I always said the land was not properly drained," she said, looking round at the pools of water lying in every hollow. I think if my wife had had more sentiment, we should have got on better. But she used her philosophy as a shield against her emotion, except occasionally in her diary when lamenting my deficiencies.

Should we find the old man dead or alive, I wondered.

If the fit proved merely a temporary one, I foresaw a scene. How savage our invasion would make him if he were vigorous enough to resent it. Then I thought of Cissie St. Claire and half-forgotten rollicking suppers in Strand restaurants. Gertrude was looking unmoved at the house in which she had been born, with its square-shouldered air of truculent superiority, blinking through its rows of windows on the damp park.

"It looks just the same," said Gertrude, "only they have cut down some trees. Shall we keep the carriage or send it back?"

This question before the doors of her own home.

"That depends. We will wait and see."

"How is he?" said I to the man.

"Very bad; the doctor is here, sir."

Then the housekeeper met us, a new-comer since Gertrude's expulsion.

"I have prepared rooms for you, my lady," she said, "if you propose to stay."

We went into the yellow drawing-room. "How the paper has faded," said my wife.

Soon the doctor came downstairs. Gertrude and I saw him in the library. He told us the Earl had had a stroke of paralysis, and lost articulate utterance, and the use of one side. At present, he was not conscious. Unless the seizure were followed by another, there were grounds for hoping for a partial recovery, at least. Perhaps until the nurse arrived, Gertrude would remain in her father's room. He must especially be kept very quiet. Then the country doctor, delighted with so important a case, drove away, promising to return shortly with the Earl's London physician, with whom he had put himself into communication.

But Gertrude did not much like her task.

"You cannot leave him to hirelings," I said. "Remember whatever differences you may have had you are his daughter."

I looked through the crack of the door. The old man was breathing heavily, lying on his right side.

Gertrude sat at the foot of the bed. The two women on temporary duty departed to the more cheerful surroundings of the servants' hall.

The following problem now presented itself to me:

At last we were installed in Righton House, its master, helpless, speechless, and impotent, how could it be turned to our advantage?

Our friends and acquaintances all knew how persistently the Earl of Marlington had snubbed me. Lord Righton had never concealed the fact at the Celibate Club, nor had the Earl himself scrupled to speak of me to acquaintances of my own as "the son of an upstart tradesman who must be taught his place."

You know how these little speeches come round in London. Funny people pick them up and turn them into amusing anecdotes. Besides, there is nothing that makes people so angry as social success. Absurd though it must seem to you, who really know me, there were some men—men of position too—who actually accused me of tuft-hunting; there were others of no position at all, who referred contemptuously to my origin. It was to silence detractors of all sorts that I sat down and wrote the following paragraph:

"We regret to announce that on Tuesday the Earl of Marlington was prostrated by a severe stroke of paralysis, and that he is now lying at Righton House in a very critical condition. Fortunately Mr. Percival Bailey-Martin, his son-in-law, and Lady Gertrude Bailey

Martin, the Earl's only daughter, were present at the time. The other members of the family have been telegraphed for, and Mr. Bailey-Martin has cabled to his brother-in-law, Lord Righton, pointing out the gravity of the case and urging his immediate return. On the previous evening the Earl of Marlington had an interview with his son-in-law, in which he urged him to stand for the borough of Dichester at the next election. His lordship is naturally anxious it should be represented by a member of his own family. Mr. Bailey-Martin, we are further informed, formally conceded to the wishes of his father-in-law; and is prepared to contest the seat when a vacancy occurs. The noble Earl has always been active in promoting the fortunes of his party, and the fact that his last duty before his unfortunate seizure was performed in their interests has lent a pathetic aspect to the deplorable incident."

I enclosed the above to Jemmie Blake, promising him a sovereign for every insertion he secured in a London paper. It proved an expensive transaction for me.

When the nurse arrived Gertrude joined me in the library.

Her father, she said, continued to sleep. We lunched together in the great dining-room, I with a good appetite.

Lady Marlington was expected at three o'clock. To pass the time, I wrote a few letters, using the stamped and crested paper of the Earl, and also sent a note to the Editor of the local paper to thank the county generally in the name of the Marlington family for its "expression of sympathy with us in this the hour of our affliction." And explained how, in the absence of my

brother-in-law, the acknowledgment devolved on me.

Then the clock struck three. Gertrude was making pencil notes in a pocket-book.

"Your mother will be here shortly," I said to her; "I hope you will manage to agree."

"That will depend on the length of time we are together," she answered. "I hope we shall be able to return to town to-morrow."

I hoped otherwise but did not say so. Soon we heard the carriage approaching, and then the bell rang.

"Come and meet your mother in the hall," I said.

Gertrude obeyed.

The footman threw open the door, and the Countess entered,—a tall figure in black, and closely veiled; wearing an obsolete bonnet of capacious dimensions, associated in my mind with her peculiar form of theology.

I had looked forward to the meeting of my wife and her mother with curiosity. It was frigid.

"You are here, I see," said the Countess, extending a black gloved hand and raising her funereal veil. She reminded me of a hearse, and, I thought what an unpleasant shock she must cause her husband if he woke up and found her there. Give me cheerful people, if you please, if ever I am in need of nursing! Gertrude accepted the maternal greeting with equal restraint.

"And may I ask who this is?" said the Countess, glancing under the rim of her bonnet at me.

"My husband, Mr. Bailey-Martin."

"Indeed."

Then I advanced and shook her unresponsive black glove.

"I have not seen you, Lady Marlington," said I re-

spectfully, "since I was at school with your son, and feel acutely the painful circumstances under which we meet."

"It is," answered her ladyship grimly, "no time for recriminations."

Then, turning to Gertrude, she said: "How is your father?"

"Unaltered since the morning."

"I will see him at once."

Then she followed the housekeeper up to Lord Marlington's room. I afterwards heard the nurse had some difficulty in preventing her from waking him up in order that he might hear of her arrival.

What a happy family we were to be sure!

At half-past four tea was served in the library, and the Countess came down to preside over it. The housekeeper had given her an account of the various guests, mostly of the theatrical profession, who had visited at Righton House, and my lady was scandalized.

"The two last abandoned women," she said, "only left this morning."

"I called to see Lord Marlington yesterday," said I, "and found them both here."

"And pray, may I ask what brought you here, Mr. Martin?"

"Political business."

"There was," she said, "a scene of course. The servants told me something of it."

But at this point a further exchange of ideas with my mother-in-law was interrupted by the arrival of the physician from town. He visited the patient, announced his concurrence in the treatment of the local practitioner, and anticipated a comparative recovery for the sufferer, unless another stroke occurred, which would be in all

probability fatal. "Lord Marlington will probably rally to-morrow," he added, "when complete consciousness will return. He must on no account be excited."

He looked at Lady Marlington as he spoke.

"I will see to that," she answered, "even if I have to stand sentry at his door."

Then, when the doctor had gone, a sombre silence fell on the big house, whilst we three sat in the library.

Sickness is doubly depressing in a house from which all natural affection has departed. The Countess had taken the supreme command and treated me with icy coolness. Silence was her shield—an impenetrable silence no commonplace remark could penetrate. We three sat there waiting for the dinner-hour, Gertrude busy with her note-book, the Countess stonily reading a work published by the Religious Tract Society, I wondering what was about to happen. There seemed a big cloud gathering over the place, out of which something must burst. But what? I was curious to see, and not dissatisfied with the day's work. I had secured a point and advertised myself. The outside public would believe the son-in law was the prop of the Marlington family. I looked at the grim Countess, who would not look at me, wondering how she could be propitiated.

Dinner, for which I had carefully dressed, wearing a black tie as a concession to the family calamity, was at last announced. I made an attempt to offer the Countess my arm, but she pretended she did not see me and stalked out of the room alone. I do not think a word was spoken. It was a painful sight to see that pious lady sipping a tumbler of water.

"No wine for me!" she said, sternly, to the servant who approached her chair. Gertrude drank two glasses

of claret, not because she liked it, but as a sort of contradiction to her mother's total abstaining principles.

When we had finished with the "funeral-baked meats," an interesting incident occurred.

"Benson," said her ladyship, addressing the butler, "at nine o'clock I expect all the household to assemble in the chapel for prayers. See that the lamps are lighted."

"Beg your pardon, my lady," he answered, "but the Earl's done away with it; turned back again into a smoking-room."

The chapel was a nominal one, and had come into existence as the result of a quarrel between the Earl and his Countess. He had insisted that the family-prayers, in which he refused to take part, should be held in a remote corner of the house where the ceremony could not interfere with him, because "if there was one thing he refused to stand it was to see a lot of hypocrites on their knees."

In consequence, Lady Marlington chose a room, removed the furniture, procured a few hard benches and a reading-desk, and, having set it aside for domestic devotion, called it the chapel. When the final split took place and Lady Marlington quitted her husband's roof the first use he made of his victory was, with the help of the upholsterers from London, to convert this sanctuary into a luxurious smoking-room, for which, in the days of his predecessor, it had been used.

The unexpected announcement of this sacrilegious alteration was a shock to the Countess. Her face flushed with indignation, and her religious stoicism was pierced.

"This stroke," she said, looking towards Gertrude, "is verily a judgment on your father!"

I think Gertrude whispered "nonsense," under her breath.

"I will ask you, sir, who as an Oxford graduate may be supposed to have received the rudiments of a Christian education, whether you have ever known an act of greater sacrilege?"

"It is, Lady Marlington," said I, "an act to be deeply deplored. Your natural regret has my sincerest sympathy."

Gertrude gave me a contemptuous glance.

"I am gratified to hear you say so," said the Countess, "and, knowing my daughter's atheistical views, I may add, surprised."

Gertrude closed her thin lips tightly—I know what she was thinking about.

"Since the chapel has been destroyed," said Lady Marlington, turning again to the butler, "you will direct the servants to assemble here at nine o'clock when I ring the bell. A godless master is served by godless servants, but whilst I am here this household shall not retire to rest without returning thanks for the blessings mercifully vouchsafed to it during the day."

It will never be known whether the Countess was including herself among them.

Then we returned to the library.

"There is no necessity for us to be hypocritical," said my wife, as we were crossing the hall.

"I'm sorry," said I, "you cannot see the difference between hypocrisy and diplomacy."

After another hour's silence the big clock in the courtyard struck nine, and the Countess, having provided herself with an Old Testament and a volume of Family Prayers, marched off to the dining-room, where I respectfully followed her.

It was long since I had assisted at family worship, —at home, as we had grown older, the practice had been discontinued.

Lady Marlington took her place at the head of the table, I mine at her right hand. Then the servants filed in, the maids demurely excited, but with a faint inclination to giggle—a weakness the acid face of the Countess at once checked.

"Are all the household assembled?" asked she of the housekeeper.

"All the servants are here," was the reply.

The Countess looked at them like a general officer addressing mutinous troops. "Only one member of the household is holding aloof," she said, sternly, glancing at me, who sighed, faintly, in sympathy. "May I ask, sir, if your wife absents herself from our devotions with your sanction?"

I was a little taken aback. "Certainly not," I replied emphatically.

"In that case perhaps you will request her to join us, and remind her an example is expected from one born in her position."

A little awkward this! But, "humour the old lady, humour her," said the voice of discretion.

Bowing respectfully, I went to fetch Gertrude. "Come to prayers and don't make a fuss," said I, "your mother wishes it."

She wore her obstinate look. "I shall do nothing of the kind," she answered.

"Don't be a fool, Gertie; humour her, just for once. She'll make it up if you meet her half-way. Remember how useful I shall find her."

"I will have nothing to do with her superstitious ob-

servances," she retorted, doggedly; "I am not a hypocrite."

"Hypocrite, indeed! there's no hypocrisy in gratifying an old lady's whims, especially when she's your mother. We used to have prayers at home when I was a boy. They are capital discipline for the servants. Prayers won't hurt you. Come on."

"I refuse," she said, sullenly.

"Come, to oblige me," I entreated.

"Nothing," she repeated, "will induce me to play the hypocrite."

"No, because you prefer to play the fool." I felt savage, but was afraid to show it. Then she stolidly resumed her note-book, whilst I thought it wise to alter my tone.

"Well, I'm sorry, Gertrude, you won't do me a favor! I don't often ask one."

But she remained silently inflexible, and I left her.

"Gertrude begs me to ask you to excuse her, Lady Marlington. I am very sorry she is so disobedient."

"Why, sir," she exclaimed, "did you not order her to come?"

"I did not consider the moment opportune for exerting authority."

Amused interest shone on the faces of the listening servants. I fancied I detected a footman winking at a housemaid. Here, fortunately, the incident ended, as the parliamentary reporters say, but it was odd that a lady who had so vigorously opposed the will of her own husband should be a stickler for marital authority in the case of her son-in-law. But, there! you can't account for these things. The Countess opened the Bible before her at the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, beginning, as she explained, at the seventeenth verse

with the words:—"Escape for thy life, neither look behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain," and I think she much enjoyed the reading herself. When that was finished she said "let us pray," and read a strongly-worded appeal to Providence to "spare us all the spiritual dangers of unbelief." The ceremony was a little ragged on the part of the congregation, no doubt from want of practice, but the housekeeper, the butler and myself endeavoured to give it the heartiness the Countess evidently expected.

I had hoped the Countess would have made some more friendly advances when prayers were over but she merely bowed and said, "I wish you good-night, sir," and withdrew.

Then I went to join Gertrude in the library and perceived I was in disgrace.

"Your mother," said I maliciously, "has been praying at you like a true Christian. I have been greatly edified."

But Gertrude refused to be amiable, so I retired to the smoking-room, told the butler to bring me a whiskey and seltzer and smoked comfortably before the fire, reading a back-number of the *Sporting Times* Cissie St. Claire had evidently left behind her.

I had some difficulty in refraining from quarrelling with Gertrude that night, for she criticised my conduct in a most unwifely manner. Fortunately, I am one of those men who can defer their irritation till a suitable moment arrives for venting it. As my pious mother-in-law had said, this was no time for recriminations.

CHAPTER XXV.

The old earl, who could not sleep for ever, recovered his wandering senses on the following morning. Surprised at finding two white-capped nurses in his room, he tried to ask them what the deuce they wanted, but his speech was too much impeded by the twist in his wicked old mouth to allow him to swear with ease.

He insisted on seeing his man, who explained what had taken place during the interregnum produced by his lordship's seizure.

When he heard of the invasion of his house by his relatives he called us "damned ghouls," but soon afforded convincing proof of his vitality. Though "it had got him all down one side" as the valet expressed it, the noble earl's seizure had by no means quelled him. His first interview was with Lady Marlington. I believe the encounter, bitter at first, ended in an armistice. The undutiful couple agreed that, first of all, Gertrude and I must be driven out of the house.

Lady Marlington came down to the library where Gertrude and I were awaiting the course of events with the ultimatum. Addressing herself to her daughter, and ignoring me, "Gertrude," she said, "your father desires me to say that your presence in his house is a source of irritation to him, and that his comfort will be materially increased by the departure of yourself and this young man."

This "young man," indeed!

This was an unpleasant bomb to explode in our camp, but I think the Countess liked firing it, for she added, "Much as I deplore the spirit which prompted your father to send this message, as a Christian wife, I consider it my duty to deliver it."

"First see your father, Gertrude," I interposed.

"Lord Marlington is permitted to see nobody," replied the Countess, without looking at me.

Gertrude was, I perceived, in one of her cold tempers. She had not recovered from our dispute of the previous night.

"I have no desire to see my father against his wishes," said she, without raising her voice. "I came here from a sense of duty, seeing the rest of the family had abandoned him. But as he is well enough to endure an interview with you without danger, there can be no necessity for us to stay any longer. I regret to say there is no place more uncongenial to me than his house."

"Our visit has been a most unpleasant duty," added I.

"I don't know whether you are aware, Gertrude," said Lady Marlington, "that your father's paralytic seizure is due to the excitement produced by your husband's visit; whose impudence, he declares, was actually, not figuratively, more than he could endure."

"He called here against my wish," said Gertrude.

"I am glad you had no part in half-killing your father," said her mother.

This was too much.

"Pardon me, Lady Marlington, but my conscience will not permit these cruel suggestions to pass uncontradicted. An old gentleman who passes his time in

riotous-living with ballet-dancers, need not go far out of his way to seek a cause for his illness. But no doubt under your care, he will soon be restored to health."

My counter-attack exasperated the Countess far more than Gertrude's malignant shafts had done.

"You will repent the day you married this young man," she said to Gertrude.

"It cannot," she retorted, "prove more unhappy than your marriage with my father."

So saying she stalked out of the room. Her mother glared after her for a moment, and we were left alone. But even in this painful juncture I did not forget my duty to the family, but made one more desperate effort to wave my olive-branch.

"These family dissensions are heart-rending, Lady Marlington! Let us forget and forgive."

My voice shook with emotion, but it could not bend this Christian lady.

"My daughter is a heartless atheist, and you a scheming hypocrite." She positively hissed this at me as she swept out of the room to bear the news of the encounter to the Earl.

Left on the field of battle, I could not but admit the force of circumstances had been against me. My plans had been laid on the assumption that Lord Marlington's seizure would reduce him to senile impotency, and that we could get over the old lady. But, although we were "kicked out" of Righton House, there was no reason for saying so. Better for the Marlington family if the world thought my wife and I were *au mieux* with my father-in-law. Whether they liked it or not I was one of them, and the sympathetic announcement I had sent to the newspapers would widely advertise the fact.

I found Gertrude packing up—I had never seen her so savage before. Our previous trifling disputes were, a long way off, not unlike the usual quarrels of lovers, and spared an excess of bitterness on her side by a streak of sentiment, on mine by strong common-sense. I knew if my wife ever came to dislike me, she might make my existence uncomfortable. I was, therefore, scarcely prepared for her attack. It was so fierce and voluble that I cannot remember her words, but she told me I had humiliated her, and caused her to be driven from her father's house, to be "turned into the street like an impertinent housemaid," as I think she put it. And then what were my motives? They were incomprehensible to her, but, so far as she could fathom them, utterly contemptible.

"It is," she finally said, "a sickening desire of social prestige that has made you crawl and eat dirt. In future you shall eat it alone; I will not share in the loathsome feast. Did I think of social prestige when I married you? You married out of your position, and you lost your head. It was ambition and vulgar social greed that prompted you, and folly and weakness that deluded me."

The scene was a painful one. My nails were pared. I dared not retort. To fight it out was impossible. I perceived it was best to manœuvre and to find a shield behind my wounded feelings and outraged affections.

When her wrath was sufficiently abated, she threw herself in the arm-chair and cried till her eyes were sore, and her nose very red.

A servant knocking at the door, announced that the carriage was at the door, and finally we drove away without bidding any one good-bye, in humiliation, like

a nineteenth century Adam and Eve driven from a terrestrial paradise.

"I hope you will profit by your lesson," said Gertrude, as the lodge-gates closed behind us. She looked damp and depressed. Grief is unbecoming to all, and to faded, anæmic women particularly trying.

But I held my peace. Suffering silence was my cue. But her whining expression inwardly made me swear. Would you believe it! she actually had the audacity to read me a lecture. Her indignation, like everything else, became coloured by her philosophy.

My weakness in wishing to belong to the aristocracy, she supposed were, after all, atavisms for which I was only responsible in a secondary manner.

But I listened to her rubbish in silence, contenting myself with repeating that she misunderstood me.

Bennett was dying with curiosity to hear all about the visit, but I told him, owing to the unexpected improvement in Lord Marlington's health, and the presence of his wife, we had not felt it necessary to prolong our stay. I could see he did not believe me, and have no doubt the footman told him we had been "kicked out," for the reason of our sudden departure was not concealed from the servants.

Gertrude decided to return to London after lunch, an arrangement in which I concurred.

"After the bitter things you have said concerning my conduct," I said with dignity, "a few days apart for reflection will be welcome to us both."

"Nothing," she replied, "will alter my opinion."

"In that case we will not argue about it," I returned.

I saw her off, and felt a sense of relief when she was gone. I could breathe freely. To stand on very shifty ground on the defensive, whilst a philosophic

wife is "slating" you because she has been turned out of her father's house on your account is a position making tremendous demands on the temper.

These are the words of her diary :

"Turned out of my father's house! turned out!! turned out!!! Scene with Percival in consequence. The very servants must have perceived the meanness of his motives. He cringed to my mother odiously, humoured her effete superstitions, affected to share them, submitted to treatment that a footman would have resented, and all for what? To be received on terms of equality by people who despise him and whom he would despise if they belonged to his own class. It is horrible to think the man animated by such instincts is my husband. But how far is he answerable for them? In another subject the problem would interest me. I am beginning to understand him. I told him what I thought of it. But he is incapable of appreciating the nature of his offence."

But what is the good of quoting the rubbish? One would think my courageous attempt to reconcile this distracted family deserving of some commendation, but Gertrude viewed it in much the same light as an attempt to pick pockets. No doubt the tone of intellectual and moral superiority adopted by my wife in the passage quoted will be duly appreciated by the readers of this autobiography. What eccentric conclusions unpracticable people draw when they criticise the acts of those who move in a different and bolder plane!

CHAPTER XXVI.

I HAD arranged to stay at the White Hart for several days, in order to make the acquaintance of the leading local politicians. I was new to the work, and telegraphed to Jemmie Blake to come down and join me —"all expenses paid."

The little beggar was delighted to come, and certainly made himself very useful, and his society was a relief after that of my puling wife with her diary, her philosophy and her feeble digestion. He brought me all the latest news.

The clubs which knew me, it appears, were talking about me. Cissie St. Claire had been telling droll stories about my father-in-law, and Jemmie's "pars." concerning his health had produced a great effect.

"You'll get into the House of Lords," said Jemmie, "before you've done. Pity you can't succeed to your pa-in-law's title. You're cut out for a legislator. I'll report your speeches. You will rise an' rise. For, saith the wise man, he who hath risen shall yet rise higher."

Meanwhile Bennett and other friends, whose support had been purchased by various means, had busied themselves in Dichester, and had commenced to smooth my path before me."

The evening following Blake's arrival I gave a dinner to "some of our leading local politicians," as Bennett called them. "Leave out the teeto'tlers, sir," said he, "you can try 'em with tea and buns at the little

Ebenizer schoolroom. The anti-vaccinators an' the rest can be tackled as convenient."

Bennett arranged a dinner for us.

At the end of the table opposite me sat his worship the mayor, whom we elected chairman. The other worthy burgesses came in due order, and the local solicitor destined to be my election agent sat on my right. There was, in James Blake's words, "no stint of liquor."

When the cloth was removed, and the port on the table his worship, as previously arranged, addressed us. They were all there, he told them, for a purpose—namely—to make my acquaintance. Who was I? "The fav'rite son-in-law of his lordship the Earl of Marlington." They had ev'ry man jack of them been touched by my manly letter in the *Dichester Gazette*, and by the feeling terms of my remarks concerning my afflicted relative. There were, it is true, dissensions between his lordship and the town, but, after all, they were of a temp'ry character. His lordship had naturally resented the election of a man like their present member, Mr. Diggs (groans). When put out, the Earl of Marlington showed it. How he had showed his indignation he need not tell 'em. I had come to them like a dove with an olive-branch in my mouth, offering peace. It was for me to reconcile the town and the noble Marlington family. With such a representative as Mr. Percival Bailey-Martin, a young politician rapidly rising to fame, who was, moreover, the playmate and the bosom-friend of Lord Righton, who, in the course o' nature must become associated with the place, to whose fair sister I had been so happily married, Dichester would soon resume the prestige it had lost, socially and politically, in the country. He wished to propose a toast, the health of Mr. Percival Bailey-Martin,

the future member of Dichester, if he (his worship) had his way.

"Port, and plenty of it," as Blake says, "hath no fellow to win a man friends." My new ones drank my health with enthusiasm.

I rose with the quiet dignity habitual to me and made the following speech, in the composition of which Blake had co-operated:

"Gentlemen, the kind and flattering words of his worship the mayor have deeply touched me. This is, as you know, a time of affliction for the noble family with which I am so closely and happily allied; and how comes it, you may ask, that I am here? Permit me to tell you. Three days ago I discussed the question of my candidature for this borough with the Earl of Marlington. 'Percival,' said he, 'I wish you to stand for this borough. Dichester, to my sorrow, has become alienated from me, owing to a political accident, and perhaps a personal misunderstanding. Humanly speaking, the borough must become vacant soon. It is your duty to win it back to the noble Liberal principles from which it has strayed, and let me once more see a member of my family representing it in Parliament.' My father-in-law's words, gentlemen, filled me with surprise, and placed me in some difficulty. I am revealing no secret when I tell you certain overtures have been made to me with a view to my election for a well-known borough, at the present moment as ill-represented as your own. The leaders of our party looked on with approval, the Premier especially. In fact, gentlemen, I gave a half promise. I told Lord Marlington of my position. 'I cannot,' said I, 'stand for two constituencies at once.' 'D——n it, sir,' retorted my father-in-law—you know his fiery temper, gentlemen, 'd——n it, I'm the head of

this family, and I order you to stand for Dichester.' I regret to say, gentlemen, that the indignation excited by the objection I raised over-excited him, and, to my infinite sorrow, may have provoked the illness we all of us so deeply deplore; as you perceive, gentlemen, there was nothing for me to do but obey. The pressing offer coming from elsewhere—whence I may not say—I rejected at once; and as I stand before you now in all humility, in discharge of a public and private duty, I beg to offer myself as your parliamentary candidate at the moment the ancient borough becomes vacant. I make this offer at the request of some of your leading men, gentlemen." And they said "hear! hear!" with as much unanimity as though they were so many local puppets and I had pulled their strings. I then proposed the health of his worship the mayor "a friend whom we all loved to honour, and in whose affections I craved a place."

Then Blake jumped to his feet and delivered himself of the speech he had always ready: a little thick in utterance at first, and blurred in expression, it grew in articulation and eloquence as he proceeded. Dichester, he said, had as yet no idea of the grand qualities hidden under my frank and unostentatious exterior. Although young and comparatively inexperienced, there were within me germs of all those seeds from which statesmen are made. "Unaffected patriotism, confidence in the people, deep-seated belief in the destiny of the Liberal party." On all the great social questions, rapidly assuming national importance, he had never met a man whose views were more broad or enlightened. Politics, he assured us, were not a bed of roses. He who started on the thorny path of public life must "scorn delights and live laborious days,"

spending his nights in the heated arena of political controversy, his days in reflection and study. Now a man in my position had every temptation to make his life agreeable.

"The world smiles on Percival Bailey-Martin," he exclaimed, in impassioned tones. "'It is roses, roses, all the way,' with him, a thousand and one pleasant things lure him from the rough ways of public life to the primrose paths of dalliance and pleasure. The joys of home, the joys of society, the joys of art, of foreign travel, and of cultured idleness. Siren voices tempt him on all sides. But, unlike Ulysses, he has no need to stop his ears. They cannot move him. An Englishman in every cord and fibre of his noble nature, duty, gentlemen, is his god; as, some way after him, I hope I may say it is ours. I have watched Percival Bailey-Martin's career from the days of its early promise at Oxford till to-day. These weak words of mine are no idle eulogy, but the mature judgment of one who, like the great Odysseus, may say:

> "'Much have I seen and known; cities of men
> And manners, climates, councils, governments.'

Yet, gentlemen, I shall see no happier day than that on which Percival Bailey-Martin shall represent you in parliament."

This was the speech of the evening. It only had one fault: its eloquence swamped mine. When the party separated, the steps of the White Hart seemed unusually steep to some of them.

The next day I spent, with the assistance of my new friends, in visiting the other leading inhabitants of the borough. I propitiated the anti-vaccinators, a formidable clique at Dichester, by promising to bring in a bill

for the suppression of vaccination, and to refrain from inoculating my own children with the *virus*, if Providence should provide me with offspring. The Temperance party would have preferred that I should take the pledge myself; but were mollified by my solemn promise to vote for local option in the borough, and to subscribe five pounds annually for the construction of coffee-taverns. The dissenters were pleased by my promise to request my father-in-law to grant them a piece of land for the erection of a new chapel; but they were even more gratified by the interesting lecture I gave them on the Holy Land, with the aid of a magic lantern Blake provided. He also lent me a small pamphlet he had prepared on the subject for electioneering purposes. The lecture, I assured my hearers, was the result of a recent journey I had made in Palestine. It went off capitally. Blake managed the slides so dexterously, that he kept time to my reading, except once, when I described "Bethabara beyond Jordan" to a slide representing "View of Joppa." The schoolchildren and their friends were all delighted with the discourse, and the tea and buns I provided afterwards. The Rev. John Spong thanked me warmly for the improving address I had delivered, and the pleasant "tea" I had "so lavishly provided"; whilst the fumes of that much-stewed beverage arose like the odour of sanctity. The children sang "There is a happy land," as we separated after what his Reverence called a "most enjoyable evening."

"And now," said Blake, as we left the heated and corrugated iron walls of the little Ebenezer schoolroom, "having promised everybody everything, you had better cut it early to-morrow, before you have time to spoil the good impression we have made."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Whether the Earl of Marlington ever heard of the draughts I had made on our family connection, I never knew. The local paper bore some slight traces of the political courtship I had commenced to pay to the constituency; but although he recovered his strength sufficiently to go to Cannes a few weeks after without the company of his wife, he did not attempt to tell the good people of Dichester what he really thought of me. As Lady Marlington returned to the musty mansion she possessed in Bath, and her husband made his escape to the Riviera without her, Gertrude concluded her father's spirit had been little quelled by the attack of paralysis that had left its traces behind in a twisted mouth, and a dragging leg. Rumour said that although the Earl's memory had become impaired, he had not forgotten to dislike his wife. Lord Righton returned on the day his father left for Cannes. He is not the sort of man to bear malice,—he is too lazy. He had been spending money faster than usual, and when a man stands in need of ready cash, as Righton ingenuously remarked, "he cannot afford to be too d——d particular about his friends."

This enabled me to strike a bargain of which I afterwards had every reason to be proud. Just before I discovered my aptitude for a political career, Righton started a racing-stable on a small scale, but not a cheap

one. One of the first results was an urgent need of money. I lent him a thousand pounds, at the rate of ten per cent., payable when he should come into the title and on the understanding, in writing, that he should favour my candidature at Dichester. The Earldom of Marlington was now indebted to us to a considerable extent, and there was only the life of a tottering old paralytic between us and the liquidation of the debt.

Consequently Jemmie Blake, the magic lantern, and I made several visits to Dichester, and our entertainments at the parochial rooms and the lectures I delivered before the local branch of the Young Men's Christian Association became important features during the winter. The only disappointment was that Diggs would neither die nor resign.

Meanwhile Gertrude and I had settled down into a life of some order and routine. She passed her time in writing her book "on Conduct," which had assumed a somewhat circular course, and, to her surprise and discomfiture, continually reverted to the same point. You have heard how the unskilled traveller who has lost his way in the desert unconsciously describes a circle in his wanderings. In the metaphysical wilderness where my wife was straying the same phenomenon occurred, and she frequently found herself proving over again that which she had already demonstrated. At first she used to bore me a good deal by asking my advice, but I persuaded her it would be much better to let me see her book when it was complete instead of in fragments perpetually altering. Consequently to a very considerable extent she went her way, I mine. Mine was not unpleasant. I used to hear her sigh a good deal, and her diary bore evidence that she con-

sidered herself neglected; but as she had no visible cause of jealousy she accepted the state of things. "You have your studies," I used to say, "I, my occupations, it would be ridiculous for us to drive about together in your victoria—like twins in a perambulator." Thus I continued to enjoy a good many of the delights usually reserved for bachelors.

May found us in much the same position as November, except that I had endeared myself to the inhabitants of Dichester with the aid of Righton, Jemmie Blake and the magic lantern. The town was convinced I could get Righton to do anything, and it was accepted as a fact that if I were returned he would present the town with an eligible piece of land to be laid out as a recreation ground.

Meanwhile the present member was sunning himself at Brighton in a bath-chair.

> "In a Brighton Bath Chair,
> In a Brighton Bath Chair,
> Our eminent member is slumbering there;
> Though feeble and dull, for we can't be all clever,
> Our eminent member shan't slumber for ever.
> Why don't he resign?
> For our member don't shine!
> Dichester says 'he's no member of mine.'"

Blake set these words, which were printed in the local paper, to a popular tune. The street boys sang it on market days, when the delicate satire was keenly appreciated by the farmers. The rival print criticised it as "execrable in taste, and too contemptible to deserve even the epithet of doggerel."

The Primrose League tried to set a song going in answer, called, "You've only got to ask and you'll get it," referring to the lavish nature of my promises, but

although sung on a platform by the daughter of a rural dean, the steeple of whose church Mr. Diggs had built at his own expense, it lacked spontaneity and never "caught on."

I have reason to remember that summer, because Gertrude had arranged that Mrs. Mimi Todd should stay with us. To this I had looked forward with some interest, and Gertrude, who ardently desired an intelligent listener for "The Evolution of Conduct," welcomed her.

Mimi arrived with an immense number of costumes and an unabated desire for philosophy. The mornings she and my wife spent over manuscripts in my wife's study, which I rarely invaded, but fate willed it that in the afternoon and sometimes in the evening I should be her companion. As you will have observed, I have made it a point to say nothing dishonourable about women. Now, all of us have our weaknesses. Mimi was like the rest of us. She was naturally desirous of seeing London life. No man in London was better qualified to show her than I. I took her to Hurlingham and Sandown. I conducted her to the theatres, all to please my wife, who deems such amusements barbarous and detests racketting of all sorts. Now, I ask you if it was my fault if Mimi lost her head a little? The nature of young men and women being what it is—imperfect, Gertrude should have been more discreet than to throw us so much together. I think it was owing to Gertrude's Scotch maid, who hated me and took an aversion to Mimi, that the row came at last.

Before either Mimi or I suspected it, Gertrude became jealous and tortured herself as only foolish women can. Clarkson, the Scotch maid, acted as a sort of

spy, and, whilst little Mimi and I were disporting ourselves, innocently flapping our wings together in the sunshine like butterflies in unsuspicious satisfaction—nothing more—suddenly the storm broke.

I dwell on these details regretfully, passing over them as quickly as possible, because I know they put my wife in an odious light.

Mimi spent three weeks with us, and we introduced her to our friends. Amongst the men she became rapidly popular and, I think, enjoyed her triumph. The women said she was "dreadfully American." When she left us she took rooms at the Grand and began, after the manner of her kind, to frankly enjoy herself, Silas keeping her generously supplied with funds, and I providing her with amusements.

Now, I do not pretend that Mimi did not exert a sort of fascination over me. Her influence which had commenced at Chamonix, I confess, increased. Gertrude's nature and mine, unfortunately, widely diverged. Indeed, it was good for neither of us to be too much together. The pale languor of her philosophy did not always harmonise with the warmth, colour, and full-blooded vigour of mine. Now Gertrude's attractions were of purely an intellectual order, and there are moments when these do not suffice a man. On hot June days, for instance, when the rose scents are too heavy for the soft winds to carry, one wants something more than philosophy in a woman.

Here were the hot June noons, the rose-gardens, the trees in full leaf, and I knew a certain nook on the river, but an hour's journey from Paddington Station, where June is sweetest, where the lawn, rose-spotted and odorous, slopes down to the idly lapping waters, where the nightingale sings, and the hay smells like heaven.

An Eden for any man who knows an Eve to haunt it.

I had painted this spot to Mimi in such flowing colours that at last she consented to visit it with me. Now of course you will say I ought to have told my wife of this trip. Well, I did not. Somehow, thanks to Clarkson, she had become jealous. Mimi had at last perceived it and was amused—on account, of course, of its utter groundlessness,—I had perceived it, too, and did not wish it to extend. So I did not tell Gertrude of the innocent little jaunt. There are some things perfectly blameless in themselves that the world regards with suspicion. My trip up the river with Mimi is one of them. It was with difficulty I induced her to consent to it, but one evening when I was seeing her back to her hotel from a theatre she consented. Ah me! I recall that drive now, the little fingers clasped in mine, and a fluttering confession that I will never reveal.

Well, on the day I took Mimi up the river I informed my wife that I was going down to Dichester on business —and that I should not be back till the following day. —You will not misunderstand my motives. I only desired to spare my wife pain. The deceit that is the result of anxiety for the feelings of others is to my mind not remotely removed from the virtues.

There are, too, other duties besides those we owe to our wives. Something was due to myself, much to Mimi, who had commenced by mistrusting me and ended in numbering me amongst the nearest of her friends. Her reputation, moreover, was dearer to me than my own; nor could a censorious world be taken into our confidence without an appalling misunderstanding.

O happy day! thrice happy day! we are at the Great Western Terminus, alone in a reserved carriage; we start, and the fast train whirls us through the country where the mowers are busy in the sunshine. Then the long dreamy afternoon in the boat, the evening in the rose-garden, a gentle idyl far from suspicious Gordons, made beautiful by mutual confidence and trust. I admit I was as near loving Mimi as our obligations would allow. * * * * * * * *

But then what a sudden change from this happiness!

I reached home an hour before dinner-time and was about to tell Gertrude the news from Dichester, how I had lectured on the economy of jam-making at the Parochial rooms! when her expression stopped my tongue.

Her bloodless face was whiter than wax, her pale eyes, surrounded by an aureole of suffering and sleeplessness, shone with a strange expression.

"What, Gertie," said I, "you don't look well—the heat, I suppose," and I held out my hand affectionately towards her.

"Don't touch me," she cried, like the injured maiden in a melodrama.

"Why, what's the row?" I said, nervously.

"Where have you been?"

"To Dichester, of course."

"Hypocrite! liar! traitor! s-seducer!"

My wife seemed hissing at me. We stared at one another a moment; I, with a sense of things crumbling about me.

"What do you mean, Gertrude?"

"You have been away with that American woman. Here is her letter."

She flung it to me. I had left it in my writing-case, and she had forced it open. Mimi wrote :

"Yes, I will come. Paddington, 10:30. Why struggle against the inevitable? This is your philosophy. Now hear mine.

"'Thou art a man,
But I am thy love,
For the lake its swan,
For the dell its dove;
And for thee—(oh haste!)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced!'"

I saw it all! The infernal Scotchwoman had read this in my pocket. Gertrude had broken open my writing-desk in the hope of finding it.

"I don't know what it means. Mrs. Todd's mad," said I, feebly enough. "All Boston ladies write poetry."

But she threw me the following telegram from Bennett:

"Mr. Bailey-Martin is not at Dichester, nor is he expected."

"Well, Gertrude," said I, after a long pause, "it is of no use telling lies. I confess I was with Mrs. Todd, but there was a party of us. I didn't tell you, because I fancied you were doing me the honour to be jealous, and——"

But she cut me short.

"Either you or I leave this house at once."

"You are mad! Fancy the scandal."

"That means you will not go."

"That would be a confession of guilt. I'm innocent, I swear I am, so is Mimi. She adores you."

But she flung out of the room, and had a violent fit

of hysterics in her bedroom, behind the bolted door. Then at last, when her maid had soothed her, they packed up, and a cab was sent for.

I was in the library, endeavouring to make up my mind how best to act. Hearing Clarkson coming downstairs, I ran out and seized her and dragged her by her wrists into the room, rather because I hated her than for anything else. I cannot remember what I said, but although she turned very white, she boldly faced me.

"You have been deceiving my poor mistress, and she'll never be happy till she has a separation. The law will give her one, too. Let go of my wrists, sir, or I'll cry 'police.'"

I let her go and ran upstairs to Gertrude.

"Don't speak to me," she cried, "you shall hear from my lawyer."

I threw myself on my knees before her, entreating forgiveness. All the house was in an uproar, the servants listening from the foot of the stairs. She was obdurate. I had deceived her, and she would apply for a separation.

And at last she drove away to a neighbouring hotel.

The scandal of a suit in the divorce court would kill me, socially and politically. Here was a doleful end to the schemes I had been building up with so much care! It was too horrible to face. How was this big domestic breach to be mended?

I called the servants up, and assured them it was merely a temporary misunderstanding between Lady Gertrude and myself; but they evidently were inclined to take her side, and if ever *subpœnaed* in any litigation that might arise, I felt that they would not be on mine.

There was nothing to be done that night. For once,

I confess, I drowned care in wine. I went to the Scalp Hunters' and drank two bottles of champagne, and returned home in the morning sun, dizzy and blinking, to sleep through a series of horrible nightmares, to awake to gaze on the ruins a cursed accident had created around me. It was all very much like a bachelor debauch, plus a ton of care.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

And what will not a jealous woman do? I recalled, with a sinking heart, all I had ever read concerning them, from Dido downwards. Jealousy is a horrible, unreasoning, barbarous instinct and unspeakably vulgar. I was never jealous in my life. When the faintest spark of it ever glimmered within me I always quenched it. The enemy of human peace, the destroyer of dignity, its existence is evidence of the degrading selfishness of the human heart and not of the affections. It dwells, too, in strange places. Cold, philosophic, psychological Gertrude, whose investigation into the springs and motives of human conduct should have built a dam against it, had allowed herself to be swept away by the venomous sentiment as though she were a common factory-girl with no other guide than animal passion. Bah! it is this sort of thing that prompts a woman to fling vitriol over a man. The only difference is that Gertrude's vitriol would be thrown by her lawyers. I smarted at the bare thought of it. Already in imagination I heard the paper boys howling "The Bailey-Martin Scandal—shocking revelations!" about the streets and my heart sickened at the prospect. But something must be done. Righton was in town. I might perhaps induce him to act as a mediator.

I found him at his rooms off Piccadilly, and told him of the horrible calamity that had befallen me. "I'm

innocent, Righton, I swear I am," I said, emphatically, "but appearances are dreadfully against me."

"Innocent, you dear lamb," said Righton, to my great disgust, laughing coarsely; "who'd ever suspect you! Not your dear friends at Dichester, with your charmin' lectures to the school-children about the Holy Land. Bailey-Martin caught trippin'?—nonsense! Why, they've published a long account of your virtues in the Parish Magazine."

"But you believe in my innocence?"

"Ray-ther," said my brother-in-law, with atrocious vulgarity, closing one green globular eye and laughing lewdly through the other. "And there's that pretty little lively grass widow of a Yankee, who'd suspect her? Human nature ain't suspicious."

But I entreated him to take a more serious view of it. Fancy the horrors of an exposure.

"Well, they won't hurt my family, at all events," said he. "My gov'nor's held in such estimation by the world, his noble name can't be damaged. Besides, I don't care a tinker's cuss what the newspaper chaps say. Great Scott! won't they have a fine time of it. They'll wire the whole thing to the States, and the papers there will just 'bust' with the fun. When I was over there they offered me a hundred dollars for an interview which I pocketed and they stuck down any rot they liked. When they hear I'm your brother-in-law they'll offer me double. 'Always believed in Martin's innocence,' I'll say, 'but appearances awfully against him.'"

Whilst Righton was maliciously talking at me I walked up and down the room with a mad desire to throttle him. "I appeal to you to help me, Righton," I said at last, helplessly, "and, there's only one way."

"What's that?"

"Tell Gertrude for the honour of the family she must make it up."

"The honour of the family be blowed, she'll say. 'How about my outraged feelings?' He! he! he! fancy Gertrude's outraged feelings. What's the good of telling her you and the little Yankee girl are a couple o' saints, when she's made up her mind you ain't? The straight tip is, never interfere between man and wife. That's my line o' country, an' always has been!"

Then out of the darkness a ray of hope dawned on me.

"You can save me if you will, Righton. Tell Gertrude you were down at that place, and that there were a party of us."

"Impossible! Tell a lie? I draw the line at lies, old chap; I won't even tell a lie in jest."

"A lie! my dear Righton, it will be a splendid piece of devotion."

I am almost ashamed to tell what occurred next, but my brother-in-law promised he would tell Gertie the biggest lie I could invent if I would give him a receipt in full for the thousand pounds he had recently borrowed. What could I do! My duty was plain. Gertrude's happiness must be restored at any price. If she obtained a decree of separation her happiness and my future would alike be irretrievably damaged.

My brother-in-law tempted me, and I, sorely tried, fell.

As the thing had to be done, base as it was, I perceived it must be put on a business footing.

"But look here, Martin," said Righton, "although to oblige you and to wipe out some obligations between us, I'll tell Gertie a cock-and-bull story about there

being a party, I won't perjure myself in the witness box if she persists in her action."

"Make her believe there's not a scrap of evidence against me; get her to promise to forego all actions against me in the Courts; entreat her to be reconciled, and the debt's cancelled," said I; and I blush to record the humiliating fact.

Then—for Righton has no imagination—I invented a plausible story, giving the names of various persons who were present, and pointing out the absurdity of suspecting a lady of Mimi's exalted virtue of any deviation from the paths of rectitude.

Righton entered into the spirit of the thing with more intelligence than you would have suspected, and drove off on his errand of diplomacy looking very knowing.

Then I went to see Mimi Todd.

She did not commence by being hysterical; but all the colour faded from her face, showing the delicate skill of her make-up to perfection.

"If poor Silas hears of it," she said, "it will just kill him. He's worth ten of you; what a fool I have made of myself!"

Then she commenced to upbraid me for the muddle I had made.

I feared she might propose a flight to the land of her birth, with a rearrangement of the marriage bond, and desired to forestall her. Then I told her that Lord Righton was so fully convinced of the groundlessness of Gertrude's jealousy, that he would insist on his sister withdrawing the charge she had made against us, that no one would know it had ever been made, and that in a day or two all would be as it had been before. But she could help. Then Mimi actually began

to enjoy the intrigue, for it is, I believe, Tennyson who says "Every woman is a rake at heart," and sat down and wrote the following indignant note:

"I have heard of the horrible charges brought against me. They are as base as they can easily be proved to be false. That they should have been made by the one woman I most respected, will ever be remembered by me with infinite pain. Henceforward, I shall never cross the path of you or your husband, but returning to my own country, shall for the rest of my life recall this insult with indignation. You, who have lived all your life in the clouds, cannot understand the difference between freedom and light raillery, and an offence of which I burn with shame to think.

"M. A. TODD."

Mimi's guileless epistle I posted myself, and then going to the Club, I wrote Gertrude a pathetic appeal to return to the home she had abandoned.

"I cannot stay," I wrote, "in your house, unless I can call it our home. My offending presence shall, at all events, be no blight on your happiness. Return to the hearth you have left desolate. I go to my father's to trouble you no more unless you bid me come. You will receive ere this, convincing proof of my innocence, not of my discretion. Let the painful incident be henceforth a closed passage in our lives. Perhaps when we have had time to think, we may resume the happy life —for whatever yours may have been, mine certainly was happy—now drifting away from us."

I need not explain my reasons for leaving my wife's house, for I know every honourable man will understand them, and if chance should bring these poor confessions of mine into baser hands that may judge meanly of me, I can accept their blame with as much indifference as their praise. My position was delicate. I had to do

justice impartially to Gertrude, Mimi, the Marlington family, my future constituents, and myself. No one can criticise my acts, who does not sympathize with my position.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE is no place in this autobiography for other people's biographies, and engaged amongst scenes and places of greater interest than those surrounding my father's home, there has been no reason to refer to my own family. They had naturally been dazzled by my successes in society, but my political prospects had still more impressed them. A Conservative himself, my father had recognized my wisdom in adopting the politics of the family into which I had married.

"Why should not a man," he asked, "serve his country and Queen as efficiently on one side as the other?"

Why not indeed? Only he used to say, "Steer free of socialism. Socialism's all right for amateurs like Lady Gertrude, my daughter-in-law, but the country won't stand it. Socialism's a blight."

When he spoke of socialism, as he frequently did, I think he had a picture of the "Oloptic" sharing the large profits of the business between the employés, leaving a one-thousandth share to himself.

On the domestic scene at Surbiton I arrived at dinner-time with my portmanteau and my grief. One reason of my visit was to be out of pretty Mimi's way for a time. To have had my name coupled with hers at such a moment would have been fatal. To go home for consolation under such circumstances looked well. Does the unfaithful man, I ask you, ever go to

his mother, to hang about her apron-string, when his wife refuses to live with him? Never. That I should have sought comfort at home, will, I doubt not, persuade all right-feeling people of the groundless nature of my wife's suspicions. That man I count amongst the basest of hypocrites, who conceals his mean offences in the sanctity of his home.

I forgot to say that my sister Florence had arrived from India with her little boy, now six months old, two days before the quarrel with Gertrude.

How could I have looked in on that charming scene, without appalling pangs of conscience, if I had been the guilty wretch my wife believed?

But a rocket bursting in the family circle could not have produced a more painful surprise than my announcement.

"My daughter-in-law, Lady Gertrude, left her house!" exclaimed my father. "She must be mad!"

"Or jealous!" cried my mother. "I was never jealous in my life."

"It appears I have come in time for a family sensation," said Florence. "But women are not generally jealous without a cause."

If this tiresome and dangerous business could only be got over, how careful, I promised myself, I would be in future. In the present day, no latitude in morals whatever is allowed a politician, and a parliamentary candidate whose character for marital fidelity has been forfeited has no chance of election.

But, thank goodness, my worst fears were allayed next morning by a letter from Gertrude. Righton's intervention, although purchased at an exorbitant rate, was not without effect.

"It is," she wrote, "impossible for a wife to live in

harmony with her husband in such an atmosphere of suspicion and deceit as that in which you have lately wrapped yourself. I can no longer trust you. During the last six weeks of my life, I have been most miserable. The more I grow to understand you, the more impossible I feel it to be for us to live happily under the same roof.—For the present, I shall stay where I am. My brother's excuses for you, show you to have been utterly regardless of my feelings. Even if your conduct has not given me any legal right to a judicial separation, it has offered me a moral one."

Here the letter ended. The lawyers were not to have a hand in our affairs this time. But I had a character to keep up. Now in England, some positions require peculiar moral attributes or the appearance of them. A little irregularity, if not expected, is certainly condoned in the peerage. But virtue, the raw material of virtue, must cling like a garment to all parliamentary candidates for such boroughs as Dichester. The bare suspicion that my wife refused to live with me would lose me a heap of votes. It was quite possible some of my future constituents would demand a public explanation. Oh, the perversity of women! My wife, who was to be my political support, threatened to be my destruction.

A month passed by, leaving the matter in the same position, except that my wife returned to her house. She refused to live with me, however, with a capricious obstinacy that galled me. My mother was so hurt by this treatment of her son, that she wanted to give Gertrude "a piece of her mind," but desisted under the joint influence of Florence and myself.

But the sudden death of Mr. Diggs brought matters to a crisis.

Dichester was vacant at last.

When I received a telegram from my agent announcing the fact, I became quite dizzy with excitement. Young, sanguine, eager to serve my country and make a worthy place for myself in the world, I perceived my chance had come.

There was not a weak point in my armour, except Gertrude. What would happen unless she consented to help me fight? The moral weight of magic-lantern slides, of lectures in the Sunday-school on the Holy Land, of reeking tea-fights in stuffy, corrugated iron-roofed Ebenezers, do not compensate for separation from a wife. "O, my! bin married a year, an' his wife won't live with 'im," said a voice in my dreams, for in dreams it was continually election-day. But to drive in state beside an Earl's daughter of tremendous radical tendencies, the picture of married happiness and sympathy, would gain me more votes than the support of all the local optionists and anti-vaccinationists in the borough.

Bennett and his wife would go against me, if Gertrude persisted in her undutiful conduct. Our separation could not be concealed. The Primrose dames would find out all about it, and tell the women in the place not to leave me with their daughters! Just think of it! Here was a tremendous punishment for a trifling offence. But I guessed what it was—that confounded, raw-boned Scotchwoman, Clarkson, regaling her mistress with all manner of scandalous tales about me. You know the sort of thing servants pick up. The wicked woman carefully fanned the fires of jealousy in my poor wife's heart, and hardened her against me. "Don't live with him again, my lady, or you'll rue the day. He cannot be trusted." This I learned

afterwards. To all young men I would say, "Beware of your wife's maid." And yet Gertrude believed in the fidelity of this monster.

It was at this juncture I induced Florence to help me. She held that, when a woman has married a man she should make the best of him.

Her only weak point was an implicit faith in her own husband, to whom, I fancy, she was continually comparing other men, myself included, to their disadvantage. But how far nobler this than Gertrude's degrading suspicions! Bah! all men—I mean all men not exceptionally vicious—are alike, although all have not equal powers of convincing their wives of their superiority to the rest of the world.

Florence alone of my family recognised my dilemma. My father argued that the world had no right to inquire into the private affairs of a public man, so long as he kept out of the bankruptcy court; my mother declared so long as one was innocent, and of a clear conscience, one need fear nothing. I cannot quite remember what Robert said, nor is his wisdom worth recording; but I think it amounted to this: private scandal can always be prevented from becoming a public one by the dexterous use of hush-money with the newspapers. Poor Bob! he little knew the dignity and untiring energy of the London press. As if any power on earth could stop all the pens of all the paragraphers! You will perceive that before old Digges "passed away," as the obituary writers politely called it, the situation had been discussed at home. This event rendered prompt action necessary, especially as a Conservative candidate was expected in the field.

I telegraphed to Gertrude. "Digges dead—need

your help. Shall I come to see you?" but received no answer.

Her silence made me savage.

Here was a whole career risking spoiling because a silly woman was sulky and jealous.

"Go up and see your wife," said Florence. "She will listen to reason."

"I daren't," I said. "Her exasperating conduct sends me half mad. We shall only quarrel. Go and see her yourself, Florence, and mind you swear I am devoted to her, heart-broken at her treatment of me, and all the rest of it."

The end of it was Florence went up to town as a peacemaker, and came back persuaded Gertrude was unkindly treated. But I always cared much more for Florence than she ever did for me, and if Lambert and she had quarrelled, under any circumstances, I should have been on her side. How much more generous men are in these things! But a sister's opinion of her brother is rarely a matter of importance.

As a diplomatist Florence was a success. She brought the following letter: "I have thought the matter over, and will help you to the best of my power, and will accompany you and your sister to Dichester to-morrow."

"You, Florence!" I exclaimed in delight and wonder. "What does she want you for?"

"She refuses to go unless I come too."

Mortifying this.

"Why?"

"Because she thinks I shall keep you apart."

Florence gave me a look that I understood. I saw it was wiser to ask no more questions. As a proof of the absolute candour of this autobiography I here tran-

scribe from my wife's diary the morbid account she herself wrote of the meeting.

"His sister called to see me. In physical beauty they resemble one another, but of the shifty, ill-concealed sensualism of the man there is no trace in the woman. This may frequently be observed in men and women of the same family. How far does heredity account for it? What is the influence of sex on character?" Gertrude here makes some conjectures on the subject, which I pass over.

"Mrs. Lambert," she continued, "apologised for coming to see me. 'There was,' she said, 'no other means. Time was pressing, and it was either a question of Percival withdrawing, or of reconciliation with me.' 'Your brother has an undeveloped conscience,' I said; 'he cannot be trusted.'

"'I admit what you say,' she replied. 'Ever since Percival was a little boy he has been shamelessly selfish. But by arresting his chances now you will only make him idle, and, I fear, dissolute. Work might save him. You alone can help him. It pains me to say so, but my brother is one of those men a woman must make the best of.'

"I understood her meaning. She meant that, having been mad enough to marry him, it was my duty to help him if I could. Percival possesses a certain superficial cleverness, inherited frequently by the middle-classes. The House of Commons, as at present constituted, is the best ground for this quality to be exercised. At times, I believe, he dimly sees into that world of ideas detested by his class. If he is destitute of idealism, he is without superstition. He respects nothing but success, fears nothing but poverty. So far I have not elevated him. But if he become absorbed in the world

of political activity he would need my help. This is my only hold over him, and induced me to consent to live with him again. The other motives urging me to reconciliation are too unworthy for me to write even here. But that I might not let him think I had forgotten or forgiven his meanness I stipulated that Mrs. Lambert should accompany us to Dichester on the electoral campaign. It would, I thought, be interesting to watch Percival under his sister's eye. I like her so far. Shall I be disappointed in her as I am in every one else? Percival must understand the election expenses are to be paid by himself."

But, enough of Gertrude's diary.

"Election expenses to be paid by himself."

Here the *mesquin* nature of my wife is manifested. She plays the *femme incomprise* in her diary to her own admiration, and then notes down that I drank six bottles of champagne in the week at ten and sixpence a bottle! Ah! my lady, if I had kept a diary about you and your intellectual vapourings and affectations you would have borne a very different character to that assumed in your own. Gertrude's luxury was to pose in her own diary to herself. Some women admire themselves in their looking-glass. This clasped, lined volume of neatly-written manuscript was Gertrude's distorted mirror. You have just seen how it misrepresented me: a practical upright man of the world appears in it as a bloated, selfish sensualist. But what the deuce did my sister mean by accepting the picture as a right one? In heart she had never forgiven me for the harmless little boyish flirtation with Edith Lyall.

Edith Lyall, indeed! now a fat woman with three babies nearly the same age to the male eye.

"Let bygones be bygones, Gertie," said I in my heartiest manner when I went back to Kensington with my sister to act as policeman.

"When things have passed," replied she, through sour and unrelenting lips, "they become parts of the memory, that is all."

But it was as hopeless for me to endeavour to soften my wife's obdurate nature as to thaw a ton of ice by breathing on it. I had not been five minutes in the house before she had taught me the place I was to occupy in it. It struck me as comic. She intended to play the part of the married heroine in a silent tragedy. Plenty of novels have been founded on the outward concord but secret disunion of married couples. Gertrude had tried me before her own secret tribunal and divorced me. I laughed to myself when I went to my own room to dress for dinner. Passing the grim-faced Clarkson, we exchanged a scowl.

Florence was certainly a godsend. Gertrude and I could not possibly have dined opposite one another without quarrelling. Whenever I made a remark I felt my wife was weighing it with critical animosity. She did not address a single word directly to me. She looked frailer and more bloodless than ever, almost ghostlike before the rich, rounded beauty of Florence. Strangely enough, the two women, apparently so dissimilar, appeared drawn to one another. It may be there exists between women a sort of freemasonry a man cannot understand; but my sister's clear eyes softened when they met Gertrude's pale myopic glance under the gold rims of the eternal *pince-nez*. We were to start for Dichester at eleven o'clock next morning. The ladies were to help me canvass. Florence was delighted at the prospect of the election. When I

talked about my constituents I could see the unuttered mirth on her face.

"The idea of your brother becoming a politician," said I, "seems a good joke to you."

"I have seen so many strange things in India," she answered, "that even that does not surprise me."

Jemmie Blake, who was to go down to Dichester with us, came in soon after, in a rather dirty shirt-front and a dress-coat with a frayed silk lining. "I've got a new bag of tricks to fetch 'em," he said, eagerly. "No more rubbish about the Holy Land, but the neatest little lecture on Tory blunders that was ever knocked together!"

Then he told Florence a number of stories, she thought funny, about our lectures, "with all the deacons, elders, and Sunday-school teachers hanging on your brother's words, Mrs. Lambert! The show was so pious and popular that your brother's been re-christened 'Magic-lantern Martin.' But let them laugh that win, we've got all the dissenters, street-preachers, anti-vaccinators, publicans, teetotallers, on our side. When we can't swallow a fad, we just promise to study the question. If there was a party at Dichester devoted to the belief the earth was flat we should have quite an 'open mind' on the subject, and admit the other chaps who believed in the spherical tradition were quite intolerant. Your brother, my dear Mrs. Lambert, is cut out for public life. Not a ha'puth of bigotry in his composition, He'll pick up political conviction in the House."

And, whilst Jemmie rattled off his nonsense in the drawing-room, Gertrude looked on grimly in silence. She had heard nothing of the magic-lantern lectures in the dissenting schoolroom.

"You have enlightened my mind wonderfully on the

qualifications of a candidate," said Florence. "My brother possesses great natural advantages for the part."

But fearing her satire might make me loom unpleasantly before the jaundiced eyes of my wife, she stopped and said, "But Mr. Blake is a comic historian."

"Take care, Blake, you will make the ladies believe I'm a humbug," said I, somewhat annoyed. "If you tell them I'm a conscienceless weathercock they'll turn Tory."

But still my wife said nothing.

But the "liberal hundred" were to call on me at the White Hart next day to ask me officially to contest the borough; so I retired with Blake to the library to scheme the part I was to play.

When I had been sufficiently coached I got rid of him. "Look here, Blake," said I, "don't talk rot before my wife about our election tricks. She won't understand them. *Verbum sap*, you know."

"Why it's not true, is it?"

"What's not true?"

"Why, that there's been a split between you and the Missis!"

"Certainly not. We are devoted to one another. Who's been talking?"

"No one in particular. They said at the Scalp Hunters' last night there were ructions between you. But I see it's all right. Only beastly scandal as usual. People will say anything now-a-days—actually say I liquor. Good-night. No offence you know, no offence."

Then I returned to the drawing-room.

Florence said good-night and left us. Gertrude and I remained silent together for a moment. Then she spoke.

"Are those stories Mr. Blake told about the magic-lantern and lectures on the Holy Land true?"

"No; invented to amuse Florence. Blake writes for the comic papers, and thinks he's a humorist."

Then another silence which I broke.

"I may rely on you to help?"

"Yes, but not unconditionally."

"You won't let anything out about our misunderstanding. The gossip-mongers have been busy already, and you know what a sanctimonious place Dichester is."

"I will do what I think right."

I opened the door for her, and she went up to her room. Passing her door an hour later I listened. The silly fool was crying!

CHAPTER XXX.

The election was exciting work. The other side fought with vigour. Fortunately the old Earl of Marlington was now rapidly sliding off the scene with senile decay, and Righton, who confessed he "didn't care a dump about politics" helped us. We had no difficulty in persuading the voters that to reject me would be a slight on the dying nobleman, whose family had been associated with the borough since the Restoration. Gertrude, Florence, and I drove about the streets, and two days before the polling, I induced my sister to send for her nurse and baby to occupy the remaining seat in the barouche. My nephew wore the Liberal colours on his cap and shoulders, and won the admiration even of the wives of our opponents. A good many people jumped to the conclusion that Lady Gertrude was the boy's mother. It was a good move.

"The dashing of the kid into the picture," Blake said to me, "gave it the finishing touch. It's no use the other side saying you ill-treat your wife now."

We let the local photographer take us in a group. It had an excellent sale. Whether I should have ever been elected without the help of Florence's baby will never be known, but certainly the sudden death at Cannes of the Earl of Marlington gained me a large number of votes otherwise doubtful. Towns, like people, pride themselves on the possession of strange

things. Dichester was secretly vain of owning for its local magnate a nobleman with almost the worst character in the peerage. The people felt it gave them a sort of distinction. Gertrude received the news with composure, and Righton hurried off to the South to bury his father. It did not occur to anybody to suggest the Earl should be conveyed to the family vault at Dichester parish church.

We arrayed ourselves in the deepest mourning. Even Florence's baby blossomed into signs of woe. My speeches were spotted with obituary reflections and mournful resignation to Providence. In secret Blake went about among the leading citizens, giving the assurance that if I were elected the new Earl of Marlington would present the fifteen-acre field known as the Meads, to the town for a recreation-ground. In some remote period of the town's history, the head of the Marlington family had managed to filch the fifteen acres of common land from the burgesses of Dichester.

It was my sense of justice and the influence I was supposed to exert on Righton that was about to make him perform the alleged act of restitution. No wonder the London papers described me as a very strong local candidate.

I was in a whirl of excitement on the polling day, hoarse with much shouting and giddy with dodging the questions of the good people to whom Blake had been so lavish of promises. The excitement had even reached Gertrude, who once forgot not to address me directly.

My father and Robert came down to see the fun, explaining to my supporters that although Conservatives, the ties of blood were stronger than those of politics; shaking hands with everybody and almost bursting

with suppressed pride at their relationship to the future member for Dichester.

But O! the supreme moment! O! the wild bliss! To find myself at the head of the poll by 250 votes, tossing on a sea of applauding and hissing voices. I cannot describe it. Gertrude, Florence, my father, Robert, had become dream-like and unimportant persons. "Three cheers for Bailey-Martin!" "Martin and anti-vaccination." "Martin and local option!" The shouts went up like unseen rockets, dissolving into happy, happy, triumphant stars. The rain poured on my head and I heeded it not, as I returned my thanks on the hotel steps to the shouting crowd. When ideas failed me, Blake made apt suggestions in my ears. But it was over at last. My friends and family surrounded me. Gertrude, pale but pleased, said, "I congratulate you." My father blessed me, Bob shook hands and called me "'ole chap," Florence laughed, Blake drank brandies and sodas. But it all passed in a dream, and a voice within me, in dulcet tones, announced me to myself as Percival Bailey-Martin, M. P. for Dichester.

CHAPTER XXXI.

But this is not an account of my political life. Lapse of time ungilds most things. The most glorious part of many a public career is the opening day of it. Most politicians must content themselves with being mere voting units, and the political incidents connected with the casting of their votes excite little interest when they are over. But as an M. P. my claims to distinction visibly increased. Journalists interviewed me, companies desired my services as director, charities contested for the honour of my name. But a year's experience taught me the House of Commons was dreary dull. The weary hours I felt it my duty to spend there, made me need excitement elsewhere. I could not find it at home. Fourteen months of parliamentary life had not filled up the breach between my wife and myself. I do not know whether she expected me to climb over the barrier she had erected, but I did not try. She lived her life, I mine. It was not my fault if a situation for which she was responsible displeased her. A woman who nurses her jealousies, broods over fancied slights, and mopes over imaginary wrongs, does not deserve to be happy. Unkind things have been said of me even by my own family—I allude to Florence,—but I deny I was the cause of the dejection that continually oppressed her. What is the use of blinking at the truth? I tell you it was the reception the world gave her book that made her ill.

Since the foolish misunderstanding over Mimi Todd, Gertrude had insisted on being a wife merely in name. For whole days she scarcely spoke, and a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her had become insupportable. But was that my fault? Goodness, how dismal she was! O, Mimi Todd! Mimi Todd! your friendship has been a dearly-purchased prize. But my wife's worries had really little to do with her, or with any other gentle friends who tried innocently to console me for an unlucky marriage. I assure you they all arose from the publication of her book, entitled "The Evolution of Conduct." Its failure would have been pathetic, had it been less droll.

When Gertrude had written the last chapter, she brightened visibly, and went down to Bournemouth with my sister, suffering from a cold, or something, for she was always ailing. I promised to find a publisher for the immortal work, if I could. I was naturally interested in the result, for suppose—a remote supposition, I admit—the book succeeded, and my wife had an excuse for posing as an original thinker, obviously she would become a still more disagreeable companion. I preferred her as an unrecognised genius.

Well, the publishers soon put my mind at rest on that score. If the name of Bailey-Martin is to be immortalised, it must be by my work. The leading publishers to whom I offered it were blind to the merits of Gertrude's ponderous manuscript. Their reader, whilst discerning in the book, "evidence of wide reading, and great industry" (Gertrude used to scribble all night long) "could not conscientiously advise its production for the public." So it went its rounds, and was declined with thanks by one house

after the other. Of course I posted the little official notes of polite refusal to Gertrude at Bournemouth. At last, somewhat sick of the business, and annoyed with some of my constituents who declared I had voted contrary to my promises in some Bill or other, as if I remembered to what Blake had pledged me, I wrote the following playful note to my sullen-tempered wife. You will understand me when, I am sure, I say playful.

"Now all the leading publishers have kicked out your 'Evolution of Conduct,' don't you think we might offer it to your dear Clarkson to twist into curl-papers?" A little joke, of course, but the cheapest way of disposing of it, all the same.

You will scarcely believe Gertrude took umbrage at this. She did, though, for my sister wrote angrily, telling me to keep my heartless letters to myself. "Gertrude," she went on, "is deeply disappointed at the reception of her book. She has had, as you know, small reason for happiness since her marriage, and now her only solace has gone, you write her a vulgar and insulting note!"

As it would have been useless to explain that she need not convert her manuscript into curl papers, I let the matter drop.

But, alas! it pains me still when I remember how this little attempt at cheerfulness was taken, and the terrible after-consequences it brought on me.

Gertrude and Florence returned to town, and my sister, her baby, and the nurse came to stay with us. Why my sister should quarter herself on us, I could not understand. I actually believe she thought Gertrude needed her company. Her presence still further estranged us, and prevented me from confiding in my wife.

Then the two women set to work themselves to find a publisher, and unearthed a foxy-eyed gentleman from Aberdeen who made a living by bringing out the novels and poems of ambitious and opulent amateurs. Gertrude's original idea was "to dispose of the manuscript." Although she did not put a value on the book, I am sure she expected it would fetch a good price. When she found the only question of price was the sum she was to pay "Sturt & Co." for bringing it out, she winced. But he explained he was "a young firm with no available capital." "All I can get out of your great work," he protested, "is the honour of issuing a book with your name on the title-page, and a profit of ten per cent on the sale after it has passed the first edition of five thousand." How I laughed when I read his letter. The firm understood its business thoroughly. But it was not for me to interfere. Still Gertrude certainly did enjoy correcting the proof-sheets. She slashed them about with a blue pencil, riddled them with annotations in red ink, regardless—probably unconscious, of the printers' bill.

It was a staggerer when it came in!

My wife—dear thrifty soul, expostulated. "Sturt & Co." explained that in contracting with the printer, they had not bargained for corrections on so wholesale a scale. The printer's voucher was enclosed as a proof of the honesty of both in the matter. The book, I found, was set up by the firm's brother-in-law, who dwelt in Glasgow, to whom it was entrusted for the sake of economy!

I don't think they often had such a chance as my poor wife! Well, at last the work was issued, indexed, prefaced, annotated, to an alarming extent. Gertrude was in fever of excitement, yearning for

reviews. They came at last. At the moment the "Evolution of Conduct" was published, comic reviewing was in vogue. The more serious papers frequently omit to notice books bearing the name of publishers who prey on the confiding amateur. Several of them merely acknowledged the receipt of, "On Conduct." One gave it ten lines, others were silent. "We do not," wrote the sapient reviewer, "like to say hard things of a young lady who attempts to write a philosophic treatise before she has mastered the terminology of her subject, since the attempt hurts nobody and may amuse the fair writer. But the authoress misquotes Kant as well as misunderstands him. We can forgive her for doing the last, but the former should be avoided, even by a lady of quality. Lady Gertrude Martin tackles her subject with undeniable courage but with most inadequate knowledge. Still she has read Mr. Herbert Spencer's 'Data of Ethics.' This is something; unfortunately, they have bewildered her, this is a pity."

"The man never read the book," exclaimed my wife with a hysterical gulp, after she had mastered the terrible paragraph.

"He spotted your blunder about Kant, at all events," I remarked.

"Never mind what the papers say," said Florence, soothingly, "'The Evening Planet' spoke of Percival as 'a rising politician,' the other day. It will soon be a sign of distinction not to be praised in them. If you had written a gushing novel and called it 'Only a Kiss,' (Kippir & Co.), the same reviewer would have described it as 'full of *fin de siècle espièglerie* and womanly realism.' I'm quoting from a notice in the same column. No one understands what he means,

but Miss Euphemia Beeswing is a happy spinster this day."

But Gertrude, not to be soothed, left the breakfast table and shut herself in her room till lunch time.

A few days later she received a whole batch of wouldbe smart notices from the Press Cutting Agency to which she subscribed.

"They all went for her," said Blake to me at the Scalp Hunters'. "'The Evolution of Conduct' does lend itself to chaff. Not that one of those chaps squeezed out a joke. Wait till my review is out! that will make you squirm."

Now, as a matter of duty, I had requested Blake to review the book carefully and "with absolute impartiality," in "The Arcadian," a clever weekly paper, and my wife's favourite journal. Unfortunately, Blake did not like my wife, he had several slights to avenge, and the vindictive little beggar availed himself of his opportunity. Now I only desired him to be just, but he was absolutely brutal if excruciatingly funny. He mauled the book about wickedly, pointed out slips in grammar, fallacies in reasoning, blunders innumerable in drawing conclusions from ill-digested arguments of famous philosophers. In fact, as he said, he "knocked the inside out, and never left the rot a single pompous leg to stand on."

The attack sent Gertrude into hysterics, and Florence into a passion of indignation.

For three days my wife remained in her room, nor did I intrude on her privacy. Florence insisted I should ascertain the name of the writer and horsewhip him, or demand an editorial apology. If Major Lambert had been home, she would have made him do something ridiculous at "The Arcadian" office. But I

refused to act in the matter. The review might be rude, I admitted, but people—ladies especially, who brave public criticism—must put up with what they meet with.

The legend says Keats was "snuffed out" by an article. In cases of abnormal literary infatuation, such a thing is, I believe, quite possible. Jemmie Blake's criticism actually produced nervous prostration in my wife. The doctor came and said she must not be worried nor allowed to read any more reviews. Florence undertook to nurse her.

The growing affection between two women so totally dissimilar was a strange thing. "I have never seen a sadder life than Gertrude's," Florence said to me more than once. I don't know what my sister expected me to do, but to thaw my wife now she was disappointed in her literary ambition, was beyond my power. I am not a fatalist, but I certainly think she was unreasonable in blaming a man for submitting to the decrees of Providence.

A man's public duties too often prevent him from exercising the domestic virtues. If I had been responsible for the failure of "The Evolution of Conduct," Gertrude could scarcely have treated me with more resentment. This unwifely feeling did not show itself in words, but in her moral attitude towards me, and was something to be felt rather than described.

Gertrude ceased to take any interest in politics. Where were the visions we had once nourished in common, those air-castles of young hope, in which her drawing-room was the salon for statesmen and politicians to meet, and policies influencing the British Empire to be foreshadowed? Vanished, all vanished.

The lady who was to preside over it and delight in my career, had become a morose and peevish invalid.

My home was not an agreeable one, but I did not allow it to depress me. But no cheerfulness could resist Gertrude's black melancholia, and as my political duties kept me much away from home, I sometimes did not exchange a word with Gertrude for a week.

The session ended soon after her book was published, and feeling the need of a change to brighten surroundings, I arranged to go to Paris for a few days. Mimi Todd chanced to be there, as I afterwards discovered, but our meeting, which had so disastrous an effect, was, I assure you, a pure accident. I had not thought it right to renounce this lady's friendship nor her society because of my wife's jealousy, but I never permitted her to know we continued to meet.

The innocent intercourse with this agreeable and talented lady would have been misunderstood by the world. I had seen more than one parliamentary career blasted and destroyed by indiscretion. Consequently I exercised the utmost caution, and induced Mimi to do the same. But the public has no right to pry into these matters, and I for one shall refuse to gratify its morbid curiosity.

But little did I realise by how thin a veil I was protected!

Gertrude showed as much reluctance to see me as I did to come under the shadow of her melancholy, which my presence only seemed to increase. I left before she was up, and when I returned at night all the house was supposed to be asleep, although a light still shone usually under her door.

The evening before the day fixed for my departure, I told her of my projected visit. I was going to a

political dinner, and, having dressed, knocked at her door.

She was sitting before the fire, listlessly watching Florence playing with her little boy. Perhaps if we had had a child, my wife would have been like other women.

"I hope you are better, Gertrude," said I cheerily, "but I suppose you are not well enough to come to Paris with me to-morrow night."

"I am not," she said, curtly and ungraciously.

"In that case I am afraid I must go alone. You won't be dull with Florence and my nephew."

"What is your reason for going to Paris?" asked Florence.

"Well, I want a little change, and should like to hear a debate in the French Chamber. An interesting one is expected the day after to-morrow."

"Your uncle was always fond of improving his mind," said Florence ironically to the baby boy. "He speaks French so beautifully, too. He'll quite understand what they say."

The baby laughed up at her in the firelight. Then there was a slight pause. Florence was absorbed in the baby smile, whilst Gertrude looked "dourly" into the fire, and I stood with my hand on the door-handle. I was determined to do my duty by my wife, and if she had objected to my going, would have yielded to her caprice.

"If you do not wish me to go," I said, "I will stay at home."

I spoke with the utmost good-nature, I assure you.

"Go, by all means," she said, bitterly. "Do exactly what you like, but openly and frankly; a desire to go to Paris needs no excuses."

"All right," I replied, nettled, "then I shall go by the night-train to-morrow. Good-bye, if I don't see you again."

I did not see her again, and left without further farewell.

CHAPTER XXXII.

This trip of mine to Paris strained our relations to the breaking-point. As an autobiographist I now find myself in a position of the greatest difficulty, for I am compelled to present my wife to the world in very odious colours. The extent of her literary disappointment is her only excuse. It affected her feelings towards me, and made her descend to the abject means of employing a Private Detective Office to watch me in Paris. Florence knew nothing of this. Clarkson must have acted as her agent and adviser in the matter. But consider the disgraceful picture for a moment! Here we have the daughter of an Earl actually plotting with her maid to bring about the social and political ruin of her husband! The present Earl of Marlington has been guilty of some mean actions in which money, women, or horses have been concerned. His predecessor had sinned in a similar manner, only more aggressively and on a bolder scale of iniquity. But it was left to the daughter of the house to compass the ruin of her husband by means of false evidence. The delicacy of my position, therefore, is great. As a gentleman and a man of honour, it is my duty to spare the memory of my wife; but shall sentiment outweigh love of truth? Henceforth you must believe all I say, and pity me unreservedly or look on me as one unfit to mix with men of honour.

Little did I think, as I travelled to Paris, that a hired ruffian with a note-book and an overwhelming capacity for "collecting evidence"—in other words, of inventing lies for the lawyers—was dogging my steps. How free from suspicion I was! The night was still and frosty, I remember, and the sea calm. I stood on the deck, watching the bright planets, deep in thought. I had commenced my public life with some success; the leaders of my party looked on me as a young and promising politician with favourable eyes. I nourished but one ambition—to devote myself to the service of my country. Already in my busy brain, a Bill was germinating which I hoped to bring before the House at its next Session. It was to provide the Board School children with boots in all cases in which their parents were unable to keep their boys and girls comfortably shod. I was carefully examining the clauses of the rough mental draught in embryo in my mind, whilst, standing in that part of the deck allotted for second-class passengers, was the hatchet-faced Jew watching for the Calais lights. But picture the contrast! At the moment I was full of philanthropic schemes to increase the happiness of my poorer fellow-countrymen, a base and venal purveyor of false evidence, might have been seen watching me with baleful eyes. But I—poor trusting victim—saw nothing, and can only now grind my teeth in impotent rage as I dwell on it.

To my intense surprise, whilst I was lunching at the Grand Hotel the next day, I saw Mimi Todd sitting at a table with two of her countrymen. My enemies of course declare the meeting had been carefully arranged. To this I here give the most absolute and indignant denial. My life lately had not been a happy

one, and Mimi understood my character and appreciated the delicacy of my feelings towards her.

But Paris is Paris. In the beautiful French capital the British Mrs. Grundy is, by association, I suppose, apt to be forgotten. It was during that delightful season when Paris is ending her year, and the shops and cafés are irradiated with the movement and brightness of the *Nouvel Ans*, that we thus accidentally met! That we met unattached, she without old Silas, and I without my wife, was an unfortunate coincidence; that chance brought us to the same hotel, another; that we were warm-hearted and sympathetic, the third. From such simple facts as these, aided by the misrepresentation of professional agents, whose jaundiced eyes behold sin even in the smile of innocence, lawyers can construct dams of legal evidence great enough to keep back a whole sea of truth. It would not be fair to Mrs. Todd and her husband, who nobly believed in the virtue of his wife, to relate all the incidents of the merry, innocent New Year's week fate decreed we should spend together in Paris. Nor does it follow because I wrote to my wife, asking her to forward my cheque-book, without making any reference to Mrs. Todd, but describing the Debate in the Chamber of Deputies, at which her spy reported I was not present, that I desired to keep our meeting a secret. But I admit it was unlucky that Mimi, who is romantic, should travel under the name of Muriel Stanmore, and that the visitors book at the hotel should bear the name of Captain Stanmore. Who this man is I have never known, but I am ready to swear I was never identified by the name. But I have my own theory of this hideously unlucky business. The wretched creature paid to collect evidence against me, may have actually manu-

factured it! Having ascertained that poor little Mimi was passing under the name of Mrs. Stanmore, I am convinced he had the audacity to write Captain Stanmore above it in a handwriting copied from mine. You will say this is highly improbable. It may be; my wife's lawyers smiled at the idea. I can give no other explanation. Nothing is sacred to a private detective. Crimes even worse than this, have been committed to make a case strong. The whole thing was the result of a marvellous series of coincidences, aided by the depraved hand of purchased wickedness. Alas! alas! alas! it is only in old-fashioned plays and novels that truth and innocence prevail over falsehood and cunning.

My wife never answered my letter, nor sent my cheque-book, and I actually had to borrow two hundred francs of Mimi to take me home. I drove from Charing Cross with a feeling of pity in my heart for Gertrude. "I will," I thought, "try to take her out of herself, and make her find interest in my political aspirations." Little did I anticipate the avalanche about to roll over and crush me—an avalanche that she had pitilessly prepared for the man she had once pretended to love. To my surprise, I found all the blinds of the house down. My first thought was my wife was dead. Alas! it would have been better so. Myself I would prefer death to meanness and malice, and if the affair could have been reversed, would have believed my wife's word against all the circumstantial evidence in the world. But the servant who opened the door, told me Lady Gertrude was staying with the Earl of Marlington. Still unsuspecting, but surprised, I went into the library for my letters. Amongst them I found a formidable one from my wife's lawyers. Act-

ing under their advice, and with the sanction of her brother the Earl, I learnt that my wife intended to bring an action against me for a judicial separation! The following letter from the Earl made the matter still clearer:

"Sir, your conduct towards my sister renders her living with you any longer impossible. Till her suit is ended she will reside with me."

I saw what that meant! Marlington wanted to get his knife into me, because he always pretended I had "done him." This was his revenge. But I think I have damned his character since. How Gertrude got the wicked little man to write that letter, and pose as her protector, I never knew. The whole thing was a conspiracy on the face of it.

A third letter was from my sister from Surbiton—brief and to the point.

"Your wife has told me all. The evidence collected against you is, the lawyers declare, overwhelming. It was not possible in so aggravated a case to counsel her to forgive you. Anything, it seems to me, is better than this life of deceit you are living. I am at home, where they are not to be consoled. So much was expected from you!"

I wrote out three telegrams as answers to these letters. Here is the copy.

"I am innocent and can prove it. Do your worst," —omitting the note of defiance in the one intended for Florence. Then returning home—a home for me no longer—sat in silence and horror on the verge of approaching shipwreck.

Then followed a week of nightmares. I cleared out of my wife's house, and took up my quarters at the Temple in my old chambers. My virtuous family

have that purely middle-class fear of a scandal, that rendered their society at this time insupportable.

This time they refused to believe in my innocence, thanks to Florence. My father came up and stormed at me. He called me a prodigal, who had filched his position from an indulgent parent by false pretences, and regretted he was no longer able to cut me out of his will. I ended in losing my temper, and told him not to make himself "an old fool," and he went out of my chambers swearing he would never see me again. How quickly relations and friends are found out in the time of our misfortune. My mother wrote and told me that I was bringing my "papa's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave," and that all that was left for her in her old age was to pray for a son who had brought "this sorrow upon them all." But as there was nothing to be gained by an attitude of humility, and sustained in this great trial by a sense of moral rectitude, I defied my father's curses, my mother's prayers, and snubbed Bob when he came as a sort of patronising intermediator to assure me that if there was anything he could do, I might rely on him. This from a man who had held himself highly honoured if I asked him to dinner. My family had set me up on a pedestal and had admired me respectfully at a distance. They had hoped to rise socially by clinging to my skirts, and for months had basked complacently in the reflected glory I cast on them. Ask the people down at Surbiton. Mrs. Martin, they will tell you, talked nothing but the peerage, and never drove into Kingston Market on Saturday, without Debrett on the carriage-seat before her. These were the virtuous parents who now turned against me because Gertrude's spies had burked the truth. The lawyers said my wife was sure to get

judgment. My own knowledge of the law told me that, however strong I might feel myself morally, legally I was very weak. Alas for the *mens conscia recti!* It availeth nothing unsupported by evidence. Gertrude had taken me unawares and stabbed me in the back, and now I was down, the whole world was jumping on me.

My supposed iniquities grew on the tongue of scandal. My brother members of Parliament began to avoid me; my constituents to clamour for my resignation, especially those who owed me the most. The dissenting element, whom I had so delighted with lectures and entertained at tea-parties, held a meeting at which a motion was unanimously passed, calling on me to place my seat in the hands of the electors "until such time as the charges against me should be disposed of." But I defied them and informed their committee that however much politically I might desire to discharge the trust they had reposed upon me, they must permit me to be guardian of my own conscience. As a public man, I informed them, "that I considered it my duty to make a stand against the inquisitorial impertinences of all self-appointed censors."

Whilst I was contending against the storm rising on all sides against me, Silas Todd, without his wife, came to London. Silas called for me at the Scalp Hunters'—the only spot in all London where I was now welcome, and where the approaching suit my wife was bringing against me was the favourite topic of conversation behind my back. But even here I felt all my former reputation as a rising young man was lost. The members adopted a "poor-old-chap" sort of style which I no longer had the spirit to resist, but which I found peculiarly galling.

When Silas was announced I admit I felt a cold pang in my heart. Suppose Silas should go with the crowd and believe me guilty, even before the Court had proved anything against me, what might not be the terrible consequences? Might he not persuade himself he was an injured husband? Although eminently of a peaceful disposition he came from the land of the revolver and bowie-knife, and who knows to what extremities jealousy may not drive the meekest amongst us?

At the Scalp Hunters' it is the custom of the servant to tell a visitor inquiring for a member that he will go and see whether the latter is in. So, when the boy in buttons, handed me old Silas's card I exclaimed nervously, "Tell him I'm out of town," seeing a horrible picture in fancy of myself weltering in my gore on the floor of the Club smoking-room beneath the pistol of the avenging Silas. I half-expected to hear an angry voice on the stairs. But I looked out of the window in time to see the retiring figure of Silas. To all appearance he was revolverless and patient and unaggressive as when I had last seen him at Chamonix. But I was not satisfied even yet, but drove back to my chambers and doubly locked my door—not because my conscience was a guilty one, but because I know how weak human nature is in other people.

To my great relief I discovered on the next day that Silas believed in his wife's innocence and in mine, and had come over to tell me so. He wrote asking me to dinner and sympathising with me as the victim of a gross conspiracy. Belief in one's fellow-creatures is found in strange places, and Silas had made a warm nest for it in his simple and kindly heart. Silas shoot me!

"My wife, sir," said he, "has explained all, and I've come over to shake you by the hand and give you the support of Silas A. Todd."

A spasm of gratitude filled my eyes with tears.

"I knew you would feel by instinct I was an innocent and deeply-wronged man."

Certainly it must have been instinct—instinct encouraged by Mimi.

But there are certain natures in which appearances never outweigh feeling. And in following this noble conviction under Mimi's guidance, the man whom the world said I had injured the most, proved my greatest comfort and support.

I confess I do not even now know the manner in which the mind of this just man worked its way to the truth. There were dark and suspicious places to be passed before it reached the light. Like all the best Americans Silas had the poorest opinion of our aristocracy. He believed their power in evil-doing was enormous, and that under the influence of the wicked Earl of Marlington my wife was determined to ruin me by an action for separation. To arrive at this he had convinced himself all that was needed was to purchase and manufacture evidence. The judges and jury in England would naturally be on the side of the Earl, and against the rising commoner, whose ruin for certain social and political reasons had become necessary.

"I see through the whole thing, sir," said Silas with that meek indignation that accompanies a life of dyspepsia, "and, thank God, such crimes are not possible in the great Western Republic where I was raised."

What could I say? I only pressed his hands over and over again, whilst the unshed tears burned in my heart. For how beautiful a thing is human trust!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The good Silas stayed in London, allowing the light of his countenance to fall upon me. I took him to my clubs, marched him about in Piccadilly, wore him as a badge of innocence, as it were, on my cap. The world that had busied itself with my story was amazed. You know what man-of-the-world morality means. It assumes, where women are concerned, that all men are guilty. Constancy and respect for solemn pledges are regarded as things of no account. It scoffs at the idea of purity, accepting a dead level of conventional depravity as the moral condition of us all. Imagine the effect of a Silas on people such as these! How could they be expected to understand him. They looked on him as a magnificent specimen of the *mari trompé*, a guileless and feeble-minded old gentleman victimized by a scheming wife and a plausible scoundrel.

But on purer and less conventional minds, Silas had some effect. The clamouring Puritans at Dichester were induced to think that after all I might be the victim of a conspiracy. They would, they said, abide by the judgment of the Divorce Court and hope for the best.

But this was exactly what I did not want them to do, as I have said before. Those who believed in me, must believe all in all or not at all.

The lawyers, to a man, declared the case would be given against me, and the "Evening Umpire" did not hesitate to find me guilty in anticipation. Leer, the Editor, after an erratic career as a gutter politician, had appointed himself a sort of moral Cato. Unfortunately the fellow had acquired wide influence. He tried me in the columns of his paper and did not hesitate to find me guilty and to tell my electors to get rid of me if my character should be smirched by the legal proceedings my "unhappy wife had been driven to take against me. For," he continued, "the evil-doer must suffer and serve as an example." All politicians, he maintained, must be immaculate, or public opinion must drive them from public life. This frothy rubbish with which the rabid columns of his paper were brimming over, made me giddy with honest indignation. I had taught myself from my earliest days to look on the weaknesses of my fellow-creatures with charity, but in that hour of trial I found everybody's hand eager to throw the first stone, and only simple-minded Silas Todd willing to stand between me and the puritanic mob howling for my sacrifice. All Surbiton said, "this is just what we expected," and circulated stories of my youthful indiscretion, that I have not thought it worth while to record here, and retold the tale with a hideous distortion of the facts of that boy and girl affair between Edith Lyall and myself. The scandals reached the ears of my parents, and my family closed their sympathies against me. "If," said my mother, "he would only repent, all might be forgiven." My father bitterly regretted the £25,000 he had settled on me when I married. "It was," he told Bob, who repeated it to me, "the greatest mistake he ever made." It was Bob, too, who took pleasure in retailing to me

the scandalous stories then circulating at Surbiton. They had made a monster of me.

"This is what I say," said Bob, "Percival may not be the saint the mater used to think, but he ain't quite a Blue Beard. Give the devil his due, I say."

This for a defence—and from a brother too. Contrast it with the heroic conduct of Silas.

But Providence decreed that the eagerly expectant world should be baulked of its prey.

No communication had passed between myself and my wife, and I had no idea of the disastrous effects the excitement caused by the legal conflict she had so madly provoked, had wrought on her already much enfeebled constitution. Marlington, confound him, had publicly cut me, and returned the letters I sent him unopened, through the hands of the ex-horse-jockey who had assumed the dignity and title of his private secretary.

A brief letter from Florence, announcing Gertrude was lying dangerously ill at Kensington, was my first warning.

Gertrude had conducted her action against me with so much energy and aptitude, that I still think it must have afforded her personal gratification. But this I have been assured was not the case. To spare her the pain of coming before a public tribunal, I had proposed to her we should have a separation by mutual consent, and was willing to accept almost any terms her lawyers might propose. She replied through them that our unhappy differences were a topic of common talk in society. A judicial separation alone would show which of us was to blame. It had since come to her hearing that I had given to my friends an utterly false idea of our relations, and she was determined to let

the world know the truth. Her legal advisers, I was further informed, were of opinion that her case was even strong enough to permit her to apply for a divorce, with every prospect of success, inasmuch as my conduct amounted to actual cruelty, but this ignominy she was willing to spare me.

But when I heard she was lying ill, in spite of her implacable temper, I felt I could forgive her. Pity stirred in my heart, and the words of King Arthur to Guinevere came into my mind.

> "For think not, tho' thou wouldst not love thy lord,
> Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee."

For are not men always more magnanimous than women?

I wrote to my sister suggesting an interview. For two days there came no answer, but on the morning of the third I received a telegram, "Come at once if you wish to see your wife."

Clarkson opened the door. How that woman hated me! She had never forgiven me.

"How is she?" I asked.

"Sinking fast."

Then she glared at me with a hard, set, defiant face. Her glare made me savage.

"Well, you abandoned woman," I said, sternly, "I hope you are pleased with your work. For you aroused my wife's jealousies and set her on to watch me. Have you no conscience?"

I scarcely knew I was speaking, for I hated to see her standing there victorious.

"Conscience!" she cried, "conscience! Hear the man talk o' conscience, who's killed his wife!"

"You infamous liar," I exclaimed, "I'll have you up for libel. I know you."

But the grim-faced woman never flinched, but only relapsed into her infernal Scotch which fifteen years of London had almost effaced. "I ken you too ower-well an' dinna fear to call you a murderer."

The hard-featured wretch made me perfectly giddy with anger.

But my sister appearing on the landing above, recalled me to myself. She beckoned me to ascend. Without another glance at the wretched Scotchwoman, I hastened to my wife's door. Florence's serene face seemed haggard and altered, and she showed no signs of the sisterly affection with which she was wont to greet me. Two doctors and the professional nurse were with my wife.

Gertrude, I learnt, took a severe chill the day before I returned from Paris, but she neglected it, and it brought on a violent attack of asthma, from which she was a frequent sufferer. Whilst she was still very weak she insisted on returning to town from Dichester, on account of "this horrible business," to use Florence's words. She could neither, it appeared, sleep nor eat, but spent her time in going backwards and forwards to Lincoln's Inn Field, or tearing up old letters. Next she was prostrated by a violent attack of bronchitis, complicated by congestion of the lungs. Terribly exhausted, the nurse feared she would have sunk that morning, and my wife's doctor called in an eminent physician, whose faint murmurs I could hear through the closed door. This was all Florence could tell me.

Gertrude, I afterwards learnt, had sent for Florence, three days before, and would not let her leave.

I shall not forget that horrible minute as I stood on the familiar landing of my wife's house where six short weeks ago I had been the master. I knew every inmate of it, from my sister downwards, blinded by an extraordinary prejudice, indirectly attributed my wife's illness to me.

The doctors came out; one knew me well, and we went down to the dining-room. I turned to the physician for his verdict. "She will probably die of exhaustion before the day is out." I bowed my head in painful resignation.

It needed all my philosophy to bear up against the crushing blow. For in spite of my deep wrongs I could not forget she had once thought she loved me. The doctors watched me curiously. I do not think they were accustomed to such stoicism as mine. Terribly sad as my wife's approaching death was, it yet brought one compensation which, when the first wide wave of melancholy swept across my soul, I did not perceive. The legal proceedings she had commenced against me would now be buried in her grave.

The physician took his departure, and the family doctor sat in silence before the fire, in case he should be wanted.

Marlington was supposed to be at Monte Carlo. They had telegraphed the news of his sister's illness thither; old Lady Marlington was expected from Bath.

A black spot seemed hovering over the house. Through the fog in the street, the sounds of the traffic reached me in a muffled and meaningless monotone. From the abysses of silence, I seemed to feel the whisper of approaching death. Full of pity though I was, my conscience was at rest. Unable to stand the gloom of the dining-room with the doctor, who thought

it right to boycott me by a rampart of silence and the advertisement sheet of *The Times*, I went to the drawing-room. Poor Gertrude's "Evolution of Conduct" was on the table. If her untimely death at that moment approaching had been hastened by any cause it lay there. On the easel was the portrait of my wife with the flame-like wings of inspiration springing from her pale cheeks, the work of that man of genius who was never famous.

Then Florence came.

"Gertrude is asking for you," she said.

I followed her up to the room.

My photograph was still on the mantelpiece. Gertrude lay there on the bed, breathing almost imperceptibly. Her face with the death-pallor on it, shrunken and livid though it was with suffering, seemed to have borrowed a dignity it had never before possessed.

I approached the bedside, and she opened her eyes. By this expression, I perceived she had forgotten the quarrel between us and that her mind was wandering. A strange film had gathered over them—the result of the opiates they had given her.

Her lips moved, and she spoke as though in a trance. "Percival! Percival."

I stooped over her to hear her words.

"Why do you leave me?" said the faint voice; "come nearer."

I held her cold, clammy fingers, and placed my face on the pillow near her. My presence seemed to soothe her, and she fell asleep.

It had lasted some ten minutes, when, unable to bear the strained position, I removed my hand and my head from her pillow. But, gently and tenderly as I

stirred, it awoke the dying woman. Her eyes met mine, this time the film was removed, and her consciousness clear. A sudden pang shot across her face. Trying to rise on her elbow she said, "You have beaten me. I am dying, and I am still your wife."

In that supreme moment, I flung myself on my knees beside her and said—and my voice seemed to fill the house—"Forgive me, Gertrude, for God's sake, if you think I have been unkind to you."

But she turned from me with a look of fear and, alas! of aversion, and fainted.

The nurse hurried me from the room, the doctor entered. Florence and I stood on the landing.

"She is dead," said the doctor to the nurse; "the interview was too much for her." Florence's eyes met mine. The street-bell rang violently, and I knew it was the old Marlington woman, arrived too late.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

That morning is a record of varying emotions and the strangest in my life. I had never been in the presence of death and it awed me.

Only the frivolous and the selfish can contemplate it with indifference. It seemed to be disassociated with the bustling world that absorbed me. From a sense of delicacy, you will understand, I avoided seeing old Lady Marlington. Grief naturally seeks solitude. I felt I must be alone. My poor Gertrude's untimely death had made a vast change, and a different life must be commenced. From the fragments of the old one about me I must build anew.

I had heard of that unforgiving spirit which not even natural sorrow nor the presence of death itself can soften, but scarcely believed in its actual existence. But I was destined now to be the victim of it. Shaken by my emotions I drove back to my chambers. Henceforward every step I took was destined to be maliciously misrepresented. The old Marlington woman hated me, and Clarkson commenced to poison her mind still more against me. She had no difficulty in persuading her that my poor wife's death was due to my brutal conduct! They actually tried to believe she died of a broken heart! Asthma, bronchitis, inflammation of the lungs and the physical causes were ignored. The old lady, seconded finally by her son, entered on an atro-

cious campaign to ruin me. This is how the story of poor Gertrude's broken heart became invented. They commenced before her body was yet in the grave.

The motives deserving of respect that induced me to leave that terrible old woman alone in her daughter's house gave her an advantage over me.

When I called there on the following day she refused to see me, through Clarkson. Unwilling to make a scene I retired to the black melancholy of my chambers in the Temple, and wrote a letter of expostulation. It was a beautiful letter, but too sacred to be printed here.

In reply I received this brief note:

Your treatment of my daughter broke her heart and hurried her into the grave. Had she lived a few weeks longer she would have ceased to be your wife. You have no moral claim on her, and only the shadow of a legal one. Her funeral will take place on Tuesday at Brompton Cemetery."

What could I do? Gertrude had no power over the bulk of her fortune, in which she had only a life interest. As we were, unfortunately, childless, it passed to some distant cousins. Alas! if she had had a child, how much happier our married life would have been, but Providence deemed otherwise. She had, I knew, made some excellent investments with the money saved out of her income, for she was a thrifty, not to say close, woman—to which I should have a claim had she died intestate. But as a testatrix, she had pursued me in the jealousy of her heart after her death. Alas! that I of all men should be compelled to say it. But Gertrude made a wicked and vindictive will. With one half of her savings she endowed a chair at a great college for ladies for the study of psychology; the other she bequeathed to Marlington, on the under-

standing her memory was "to be vindicated after her death! My husband, Percival Bailey-Martin, will misrepresent the causes of my alienation from him after my death. He is without honour and without scruple." These were the words of the will she made just after her attack of asthma, when she believed she might not live long enough to bring to a conclusion the suit she had commenced against me. The misguided woman left behind her also a mass of papers bracketed "Evidence against Percival Bailey-Martin." These documents were carefully and methodically arranged for the purpose of blasting my character.

Poor Gertrude, jealousy had driven her mad. Still I can forgive her. For who knows better than I how "whispered words can poison truth."

But I will not dwell on this horrible period. Old Lady Marlington would not even allow me to have a voice in the funeral arrangements. They were carried out without consulting me, and my unhappy wife was nailed in her coffin without my seeing her face again.

What I could do in Gertrude's honour I did. I caused a cross of white flowers four feet high and three feet wide to be made, and took it with me in a brougham to the cemetery. No place was offered me in the mourning coach. It held Marlington and the three distant cousins, the heirs-at-law. I sat alone in the hired brougham with the cross, and Robert and my father followed in their own carriage. When we met round the grave Marlington pretended he did not see me; and the three pink-eyed, rabbit-mouthed cousins—one a curate—also ignored my presence. My father even thought it becoming to adopt an attitude of disapproval—copied from some long-forgotten actor in the part of King Lear. In fact I, Percival Bailey-Martin, Member

for Dichester, was boycotted over the open grave of my wife. A crowd assembled, attracted by the enormous size of the cross I had placed on the coffin. The white tombstones blinked through the smoke-saturated yellowness of the day. The fair white petals of the last offering I could make my wife were withered and chilled by the poisonous atmosphere. We stood around the grave on the thick clay of the closely-packed cemetery, a band of mourners of whom I alone sorrowed. The heirs-at-law were I am sure doing sums of mental arithmetic, re-investing, I doubt not, the heritage which a juster law would have allotted to me. It was only owing to the "greatest mistake my father ever made in his life," that I did not stand there, meekly defiant, a pauper as well as a widower. Even in that black minute, life was not without its consolations.

We were separating as silently as we had met. No one exchanged a word with me except Robert. "This is a rum start," said he, "a very rum start! The gov'-nor means to wash his hands of you, but if you don't get kicked out at Dichester, he'll come round."

But I could not stand this.

"Tell my father I can do without his patronage, and try to prevent him from making an old fool of himself. Look at him now."

For he was obsequiously apologising for me to Lord Marlington, if I can read the expression of his back! His humiliating conduct was unspeakably painful.

Then for the first time I lost my temper, and hurrying up to the group I said, "Look here, Marlington, I have submitted to the infernal impertinence of you and your mother long enough. Now my poor wife is buried I need remain silent no longer. If you persecute me by 'vindicating' poor Gertrude, as she called it, I'll

speak the truth about you. I know what you intend. There's a plot at Dichester to drive me out of Parliament. Nothing will induce me to resign."

Marlington's yellow face grew white.

"Any communication you have to make must come through my lawyers," he said.

The pink-eyed cousins gaped with long white teeth till I felt inclined to knock their wizened heads together, and my father looked on, unable to speak.

As I turned hastily away I could see him apologising once more for my outburst of honest indignation.

Driving back to the Temple I could not help thinking how fortunate it was I could always indulge in the luxury of biting back at the pack of curs barking at my heels. Thank you, *mon bon papa!* thank you.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I HAVE now reached a point in my autobiography where it attains almost national importance, for I am about to tell you of the fight I carried on against bigotry and intolerance in the cause of freedom. Englishmen think that when a man in any country has a right to say whatever he chooses the last point has been reached in the limit of personal liberty. At any rate we have made no real progress beyond it; we are not yet free enough to enable the just man to disregard the outcry of sanctimonious cliques. Somebody said he would rather see this great country free than sober under compulsion. I think it was one of our bishops. No one recognises more clearly than I the necessity of morals in politics, but to the end of my life I shall maintain that until a Member of Parliament is found guilty of some offence before a court of justice his constituents must accept his word as a proof of innocence. It was for this great principle I fought a tremendous battle against overwhelming odds. But I was not properly supported in the House. Although every member of my acquaintance in private agreed with me, not one in public dared to identify himself with the principle I upheld with so much courage.

Marlington went down to Dichester with the object of turning my electors against me. When the case with which my poor wife threatened me was pending

the local conscience of the dissenters turned against me, as you already know. Gertrude's death would have enabled me to appease them, had it not been for the infamous conspiracy my brother-in-law formed against me. There had sprung up a strong "local" purity party at Dichester. A rich grocer in the High Street, suspected of indiscreet conduct with his wife's pretty housemaid, had been compelled to sell his business at a great loss and leave the town. This party was continually on the look-out for "immorality" in high places as well as seeking to "purify" the ancient borough, which was no better or worse than any other in the neighbourhood of a cavalry depot. When I was elected I had permitted my name to be used as the nominal president of this society, and had read a paper before them which James Blake had written for me on "Man-of-the-World Morality." It was a perfectly sincere expression of opinion on my part, but written in a somewhat unctuous style. "Give it them thick," Blake had said, "and with lots of oil." It was much liked, especially as the conduct of a Tory Member of Parliament in the same county, suspected of irregularity of life, was deplored by innuendo and suggestion. Directly the scandal burst upon Dichester, the local paper on the other side reprinted my address with much scurrilous and unjust comment. Then all the Stigginses and Chadbands of the place, who had been proud a few weeks ago to come to my lectures and ask a blessing on the "teas" I had offered, waxed wroth, and it was from this little nucleus of hypocrisy and cant that the demand for my resignation, of which I have told you, sprung. As I have already said, under ordinary circumstances I should have been able to pacify these odious people when my wife died, had

it not been for an attack of unparalleled bitterness in the "Evening Umpire," written, as I at first supposed, by Leer, who believes an angel stands at his elbow to direct his paper in the right path of morality and aggressive non-conformity.

From internal evidence I perceived the writer had been entrusted with the papers docketed by Gertrude, "Evidence against Percival Bailey-Martin."

My first idea was to commence an action for libel against "The Umpire," but that would have been followed by the publication of the papers and letters Leer held over my head. "They were," he said in private, "enough to damn St. Paul himself." It was clear I should be playing into Leer's hands by taking action against him. Behind an hypocritical rampart of "daring everything in the cause of public morality," he defied me to appeal to the law for protection. "There are times," screamed "The Umpire," "when all leaders of opinion must speak out. We must not hesitate, even were it a question of Pitt himself or 'the heroic victor of Trafalgar' to demand immaculate purity with our public men. There was no compounding with sin."

I hurried to Dichester, and publicly declared my intention of horse-whipping the scoundrel who had defamed me in "The Umpire," but was obliged to deliver my message to the reporters. I could not even hire a hall to speak in, and the White Hart refused to have me as a guest. Marlington was spending his sister's legacy munificently in ruining me. There was not a dirty little boy in the place unacquainted with some scandalous story about me.

"Resign! resign! resign!" was the shout that drowned my words at a second public meeting con-

vened in the roofless Drill Hall, the only place now opened to me. I then issued an address to my constituents pointing out there was a cabal to ruin me. I had, I said, no desire to represent them. Private sorrows made public life "one long torture." But in refusing to place my resignation in their hands I was fighting for the great principle of members' rights. "I shall outlive," I said, "the storm of purchased obloquy and venal abuse now raging about me, and a day will come when the real truth will transpire, and those whose clamours for my social and political destruction are now loudest will deplore their injustice and folly in ignorantly siding against me in the most detestable plot ever yet set in motion to destroy a man who, whatever his shortcomings, stands before you with conscience unsullied. I refuse to resign because resignation would be equivalent to a confession of guilt. The innocent man need fear nothing, and I defy my enemies to do their worst."

My address won me a few friends, chiefly Conservative voters, and some attempts were made to get up a public meeting at the Town Hall, but when I learned that it was their intention to pelt me with rotten eggs and bags of flour directly I attempted to get a hearing, I refused to hold any further parley with my mutinous electors. I wrote to the mayor, declining to waste time in trying to address bands of howling roughs. "I leave Dichester," I said, "with no intention of speaking again in public till the time for proving my innocence comes."

Returning to town I found this quarrel with my electors had roused the interest of the country. There was no longer a newspaper in the three kingdoms ignorant of my name. "The Member for Dichester

and his constituents" was a constant head-line in the evening newspapers. Leader-writers made me their theme; interviewers demanded to see me, and the Editor of the "Omnipotent Review" offered me fifty guineas for an article on "The Rights of Private Members, and the Claims of Constituencies." It was through my desire to avail myself of this opportunity of judicially giving my case to the educated public that I became involved in another scandal.

I had seen nothing of James Blake for some time. I had written to ask him to come down to Dichester, but he had not answered. This I had imputed to one of his frequent attacks of inebriety. His literary help would have been useful to me in the preparation of my article in the "Omnipotent Review," and I was prepared to pay him for his help. I sought him at the Scalp Hunters' at night. The excitement in which I had lately lived had kept me from my old haunts. I found a number of men there, amongst them a journalist who bore no love to "Jemmie," as I used to call him in early and happier days.

The general conversation dropped when I sat at the supper-table. Men eagerly talking theatres, politics, books, ceased directly I approached; for suddenly I had become—famous shall I say? for fame it is when rumour wags her tongue at the mere shadow of your name.

"When the hawk flies into the wood all the little birds are silent," said the journalist. The whole table paid me the deference of listening whilst I spoke.

"I'm no hawk, but a much harried and perplexed small bird," I answered. A few months ago no one would have heeded me; now the shadow of my personality overawed them. I had been dipped in the

tragic waters of strife; I had fought howling mobs for a hearing; I was the single champion of a forlorn hope. Trifles had disappeared from my life. Indeed that simile about the hawk was not an unhappy one. The men who had once "old-chapped me," who had not even hesitated to try their clumsy banter at my expense, looked at me across the decanters, through the steam of chops, Welsh-rarebits, and other savoury messes, expectant, curious, but respectful. What I said would, I knew, be stored up and retailed by them with pride. And the man who could say to-morrow, "I met Bailey-Martin last night," would feel a glow of superiority.

I talked to them calmly of my position. I had adopted my present attitude of studied defiance from a sense of public duty. I should be conquered, but I had paved the way for others who might desire to fight against the great reviving tide of cant, hypocrisy and modern puritanism. Then I lit a cigar, and offering one to my neighbour the journalist, asked him if he had seen anything of "our little friend Jemmie lately." As I spoke I thought I beheld a glance of amused uneasiness flicker round the table.

"He'll be here to-night," said he.

When, a little later, I went up to the billiard-room, he followed me.

"Excuse me," said the man who did not love Blake, "but I want to tell you as a journalist how much I deplore those infernal attacks in 'The Umpire.' There was, I see, another to-day."

"I'll horsewhip Leer," said I.

"Leer never wrote them."

"Who did?"

"You won't mention my name if I tell you?"

"No, why should I?"

"Well, it's no secret," he continued. "There's not a man in Fleet Street who hasn't heard it. I was on the staff of 'The Umpire,' Jemmie Blake has taken my place. He came in when I was down with influenza. In fact, I played the part of young hedge-sparrow to his cuckoo, and never got back to the nest. Blake's a d——d little scoundrel. He wrote those articles and has a lot of others up his sleeve. If I were you I'd break his neck!"

"Thank you," I said, "it doesn't much matter after all who the blackguard is."

It was Blake then—Blake who reminded me more of a weevil in a rotten biscuit than anything else—who had been purchased by Marlington, and was doing his best to sting me to death! I sat and watched the players making cannons and hazards in a dream, gathering indignation unconsciously, as a cloud charges itself with electricity. After a while—it was about half-past one—I went once more to the supper-room, and there, sitting at the table was the man, once my friend, but now the hireling scribe, the assassin purchased to stab me in the back. How joyfully and skilfully he performed his work! When our eyes met, all the men in the room watched us.

"Glad to see you, Bailey-Martin," said Blake. "Congratulate you on your address—too flowery, perhaps, but to the point."

I smiled at him, but I decided I would not lose sight of him any more that night. When you have an explanation with a man like Blake, if you are wise you will have it when there is no one by. I lit another cigar, and sat and watched Blake eating his supper. He was a little uneasy, but it did not spoil his appetite.

He had a steak, followed by some stewed cheese and a bowl of celery salad. At half-past two there were only two other men left in the supper-room, and when they rose to go, I left, too, also wishing Blake "good-night" and "hoping to see him at my chambers soon."

"I'm quite longing to see you," he said, relieved at my departure. I think he was afraid of being alone with me.

The night was dark. The lamps on Waterloo and Westminster Bridge blinked through a damp drizzle. I turned the corner of the now quiet street and waited for Blake.

In ten minutes he appeared, his contemptible little body wrapped in a thirty-shilling ulster, three sizes too big. I stood in the darkness of a doorway. I had not the slightest idea of what I intended to do when I sprung forward and caught him by his baggy, flapping garment.

"Well, you little hound, you literary cut-throat, you mean blackguard," I said, "I've got you, and I'll half kill you."

The savage instinct for once in my life mastered me, nor do I regret it.

"You're drunk, you big coward," shrieked he. "Help! police! help!"

Then I thrashed him with my stick, laying it on furiously on his head and face, not knowing and not caring where it fell. The blood ran down his face, and he shrieked wildly in rage and terror. But the stick broke, and he tried to run, but I caught him again and beat him with my fists till he fell, half stunned. But even then the fierce tide of my accumulated indignation was unsatisfied. Seizing him by his collar I dragged him to his feet again and dealt him a blow

with my fist between his eyes, just as two policemen rushed up and laid hold of me. A group of belated revellers joined us at the same time, shouting, "run him in!"

Blake, in a bloody and battered condition, was picked up and at once accused me of attempting to murder him.

I gave the constable my card, which at once made him assume a more respectful air towards me, and we went, followed by a small crowd, to the Bow Street Station. In the gaslight, Blake presented a wretched appearance. My stick had gashed his face, and he was faint from loss of blood.

"I charge Percival Bailey-Martin with trying to murder me. Write it down, Inspector," he shrieked, "write it down."

"The big gent would have pretty nearly killed the little 'un if we hadn't come up," said one of the policemen in corroboration.

"He did lay it on," said the other.

"Yes, lock him up, lock the beast up," shrieked Blake, still shaking in every limb. "He'll murder me if you don't."

"Hold your tongue," cried the Inspector; "Members of Parliament don't commit murder."

Then, whilst Blake was sobbing hysterically in a blood-stained check handkerchief, the Inspector turned to me and said he was afraid he must keep me there all night, since the case was a very serious one.

Finally, after being revived with brandy, Blake was taken to knock up a neighbouring surgeon to have his broken head mended, whilst I was obliged to sit in the office and meditate till morning. But why prolong an ignominious incident? At eight o'clock my friend

Boulger, Q. C., who lives in chambers next to mine, was induced to come and bail me out.

A few hours later, on the bills of the evening papers you might read: "Alleged charge of attempted murder against an M. P."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Well, Blake's charge of murder missed fire; Boulger insisted that the case was one of ordinary assault, when he addressed the magistrate on my behalf. The attacks that had appeared against me in "The Umpire" were well known to be written by Blake, a man who had once been my friend; and though he (Boulger) was the last man in the world to palliate violence, he submitted I had been sorely tried. At least one half of the public, he assured the magistrate, maintained that, in taking the law into my own hands, I had acted rightly; and although he was not himself in that number, yet he considered the case one to be dealt with at once and with leniency. The charge was a ridiculous and preposterous one.

Blake appeared in Court with his head aggressively bandaged up, but my counsel had no difficulty in exhibiting the little villain to the magistrate in an odious light. I was fined five pounds and bound over to keep the peace.

But the next day the radical papers opened fire. "What a miscarriage of Justice!" they cried. "The Umpire" outdid itself.

It hinted I had added perjury to my other offences, and declared that I should have honestly been "doing my six months," if I had been a working-man. I had been guilty of a cowardly and brutal assault with a

loaded bludgeon on a literary man of "unblemished honour" and splendid abilities, because, forsooth, he had dared to speak the truth for the public good. "The Umpire," for its part, much regretted that Parliament was not sitting, in order that the attention of the Home Secretary might be called to this "atrocious perversion of right. After this final outrage against law, order and common decency, it is to be hoped the electors of Dichester will be able to get rid of their precious member. If they cannot do so, we trust the House itself will expel from their midst a man who has shown the brutality of a Bill Sykes with the immorality of a professional Don Juan up to date."

But the public were delighted with the fun, and the other papers insisted I ought to bring an action for libel against "The Umpire," whilst a comic journal of high standing gave a cartoon representing a harpy with Leer's ugly head tearing with long claws at me chained to a rock. Beneath were the words: "The Vampire and its victim." The "Vampire," as you know, being the nickname of that infamous print, "The Umpire."

Meanwhile I was not idle. Leer and his crew had by this time overdone it, and a reaction set in in my favour. Letters of sympathy reached me from all sides, from America as well as from England. All the enemies of Vampirism, as Leer's incomprehensible medley of politics, ethics and fanaticism was now called, began to side with me; and had it not been that I had once dallied with his party and delivered that unlucky lecture on "Man-of-the-World Morality," I believe I should have conquered in the end. I had now many able counsellors, and my article on "The Rights of Members, and the Claims of Constituents" was expected with much interest by the public. It was announced

that the "Omnipotent Review" would also contain my answer to the infamous charges of Leer. In concocting this I was fortunate enough to meet with a clever man of letters who had written a book entitled, "My Friends' Wives," which "The Umpire" had gone out of its way bitterly to attack as a book of strongly immoral bias on the philosophy of adultery. The author of this loathed Leer as much as I did, and was considered the strongest opponent Vampirism ever had. The article, which appeared under my name, was our joint production; he was responsible for the satire, whilst I supplied the righteous indignation. By mixing up a number of side-issues my position was strengthened. By this time it was only very clear-headed people who remembered the original claim of my constituents against me. I must, it was said, either clear my character publicly in a court of law, by bringing an action against Leer, or resign my seat. But this simple issue had now become a very complex one. Instead of sinking into oblivion beneath the storm, I tossed over its waves under the fascinating lime-light of publicity. So famous had I become that my father, mother and Robert were converted to my cause, and what natural affection was not able to accomplish was easily brought about by their vanity. It is not every suburban family that can boast of a son doing battle in the cause of freedom.

But as the issues of my dispute with my constituents and "The Umpire" widened, the campaign spread over too extended an area to be conducted by one man, and a committee was formed to assist me. Lord Macaulay said no army led by a debating society ever marched to victory.

I attribute my defeat in some measure to the fussy

interference of the good people who supported me with money, influence and conflicting counsel.

Dichester had been stirred to its lowest depth by the conflict, and a party had arisen there to support me. They were even noisier than my opponents, and had little difficulty in persuading my committee they represented a majority in the borough.

Accompanied by a number of able speakers I addressed several public meetings, carefully packed beforehand by my supporters. O'Rooke, the great Irish orator, made a splendid speech in my favour. Cuffin, the famous author of "Logic as applied to Politics," demonstrated the purity of my motives, whilst the Rev. Arthur Pugh spoke of the dignity and heroism with which I wore the martyr's crown.

The meeting terminated amid enthusiastic cries of "Bailey-Martin for ever!" "We'll re-elect you!" "Down with Leer!" "Down with cant!"

So wild was the excitement that a row occurred in the High Street and the windows of the Little Bethel corrugated iron school-room were broken, when a prayer-meeting was being held to entreat for the intercession of Providence in order that a "Christian borough might be relieved of the disgrace of its present Member."

It was against my own better judgment that, finally, I consented to seek re-election. But I do not think Dichester will soon forget the electoral fight which deprived me of my seat, although I shall always consider it a grave error of judgment. My party had treated me badly, and hinted I was a thorn in their side. I determined, therefore, to come before the electors as an independent candidate. The leaders of my party, who counted on the dissenters and feared Leer, insisted on opposing me. Their candidate was

one of the pink-eyed, rabbit-mouthed Marlington cousins. The Conservatives ran Captain Rooper, a bluff, deep-chested naval officer, with a stentorian voice, who had been only a couple of hundred votes behind me at the last election.

A few hours' canvassing convinced me my defeat was as certain as Rooper's election. Half the people who supported me by shouting and rioting I soon discovered did not possess a vote. Universal suffrage would, I believe, have placed me at the head of the poll. But in this useless form of popularity I could see no solid consolation. My warmest friends were six hundred brick-makers (of whom only ten had votes), recently imported to Dichester to work on some newly-discovered brick-fields. But these worthy people were easily convinced I was the victim of a conspiracy. The way had been well paved for this by a socialist preacher, who had persuaded them they ought to divide the Marlington estates between them and share the profits of the brick-fields on which they were employed.

But if they could not vote they could frighten the fat tradesmen of the High Street into putting up their shutters, and rush up and down shouting, "Martin for ever."

They turned the meetings of my opponents into riotous assemblies, which even the voice of Captain Rooper could not dominate, and entirely silenced the feeble and thin squeak of the pink-eyed cousin.

Bob and my father came down, and the latter actually got on a platform unexpectedly and assured the people I had been "a noble son, a good but cruelly misunderstood husband." Enthusiasm carried the foolish old man a long way; why could he not recognise this before the lime-light was turned on! But I forgave him, and

not one bitter allusion to the past has escaped my filial lips. The poll was declared at ten o'clock at night. I was at the bottom of it,—fifteen votes behind the Marlington cousin, and nearly a thousand below Captain Rooper. I had never hoped to win, and had I followed my own opinion the contest would not have been provoked. Still I had "drunk the delight of battle," not, it is true, "with my peers," but with sham religion and the "Vampire Conscience," as my collaborator nicknamed the cluster of hypocritical sentiments Leer and his canting clique had set in motion against me. Nor was I entirely unavenged. My supporters, many of whom, I regret to say, had been plied with liquor by the young bloods who had come down from town to help me canvass, howled savagely when they learnt the figures against me. Then all at once it was rumoured amongst the crowd that Leer was at the White Hart gloating over my overthrow—which he had helped to contrive. I have been accused even of having given encouragement to the riot which now occurred, but unjustly, for, had any evidence existed, the Dichester municipality would have brought an action against me for damages. They badly wanted to find some one to pay for the smashed street lamps, which eventually had to be paid for from the pockets of the rate-payers.

The crowd by this time was in that frame of mind in which the savage instincts of the chase invariably come to the surface. All at once shouts of "Catch the Vampire" arose. They were rough, I admit, not "roughs," as the papers said next morning, but a crowd of indignant and voteless working-men who deemed me wronged, and howled at Leer from sheer honest love of fair-play. The brilliant author of "My Friends' Wives" may have urged them on, but of

this I know nothing. At all events, the mob, or rather, a big fragment of it, rushed down the High Street from the Town Hall to the White Hart and began to roar outside for Leer, qualifying his name with every perversely picturesque epithet much practice in abuse could suggest.

The small body of rural policemen were swept away by the rush they vainly endeavoured to stem.

The doors of the White Hart were barred, and the figures on the balcony of the bay-window of the coffee-room disappeared. It was, as the author of "My Friends' Wives" said, like a scene from the French Revolution. But Leer, low fellow though he is, is no coward, at last appeared on the balcony, and attempted to address the howling crowd, until a stone, thrown at his head, smashing the window behind him, compelled him and his friends to beat a hasty retreat. To an angry mob there is something wildly encouraging in the crash of glass, and in another minute there was not an unbroken pane in the ancient hostelry. My sympathetic but simple-minded friends had, we afterwards learnt, thoughtfully filled their pockets with missiles in case of need.

At Dichester, as well as in Ancient Rome, fury will furnish arms. *Furor arma minstrat*, ha! ha! ha! It is pleasant to see one's tags of Latin become accomplished facts. Then, it appears, Bennett, amidst the crash of stones and the bursting of bottles at his bar, insisted Leer should escape to the neighbouring police-station by the back door. The moment he was gone, the terrified innkeeper, by means of an ostler, informed the crowd of the Vampire's flight.

The mob at once set forth in pursuit, and Leer was cut off before he could reach the shelter of the friendly

police-station. A number of constables, guessing the intention, gathered round him with drawn truncheons. A fierce skirmish for his possession ensued, of which my friends and I were the amused spectators. Leer was knocked down, and rolled over and over in the mud, and many honest heads were broken before he was dragged, hatless and up-side-down, into the station. The High Street by this time was seething with mischievous rioters; and, whilst some of the light-hearted combatants were smashing the gas-lamps in emulation, a troop of cavalry, summoned by the panic-stricken mayor, clattered into the market-place, and there drew up. Their presence, however, was not needed, for the rain began to fall steadily, and soon damped the ardour of the rioters, now tired of the fun. Some of the most able-bodied and pugnacious, moreover, had been dragged into the police station, fighting to the last in my cause with splendid energy. The troopers trotted down the High Street; the police rallied, the mob was split up and dispersed, and quiet was at length restored to the ancient borough of Dichester, that had indeed got rid of its Member, but at a price they scarcely expected to pay.

Such was my adieu to Dichester. And I think my leaving it was not unworthy of my coming.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It will give you an idea of the place I occupied in the public mind, when I tell you that I have been the subject of two hundred and fifty-seven leading articles, over four hundred paragraphs, and innumerable minor press references. I kept the people at Binks's Agency, to which I subscribed, busy, I can tell you. Binks himself told me he had only once sent as many "cuttings" to a client before, and "she was a prima-donna, sued by her husband for divorce." But think not, gentle reader, that I care for all these things. Press notices delight me not. Abuse or blame are alike to the just man. To walk down Piccadilly and hear the passers-by say "There goes Bailey-Martin," could afford little pleasure to a man like me. Yet, whenever a man has been shot up to a great height by an explosion of popular forces, fired by contending currents of feeling, he must inevitably experience a sense of departed glory when, in obedience to the laws of gravitation that exist in the world of mind as well as in the world of matter, he falls once more to nearly the same level as a poet or a man of science. Having driven me from public life, "The Umpire" ceased to abuse me for a time and, so far as I was concerned, the world settled down into its former groove. But I had drank of the strong waters of publicity, and found little consolation in the excitement London could afford me. Besides, a number

of my fashionable friends and acquaintances had thought it "good form," as they call it in their vulgar parlance, to cut me. Tons of mud had been hurled at my head, and some of it had stuck. My new friends were, as Bob said, "a rum lot." Some were the *chevaliers d'industrie* of politics, others fools and faddists. I was a politician belonging to no party, and it was thought by the people with whom the vicissitudes of my career brought me into contact, that some constituency or other might be induced to ask me to represent it at the approaching general election.

I think, looking back to my voluminous correspondence, that this might have come to pass had it not been for the publication of the "Life and Literary Reliques of Lady Gertrude Bailey-Martin," which appeared anonymously eighteen months after her death. That venomous little toad, Blake, was the author of it. It was, I admit, a very fine piece of work, the finest he ever did. It proved hate may be a greater stimulus to art than love. My name was scarcely mentioned but indirectly by innuendo and suggestion. I was made to play the part of the villain. The reason given for publishing the book was, in the author's words, "to prevent so touching a record of a woman's life passing into oblivion." The real reason, to ruin me. In "The Umpire" my reputation had been banged clumsily with a brutal bludgeon; but in my wife's memories it was reached by the subtlest of literary poisons. It had a great success and was read by everybody. Sentimental women cried over the much touched-up lines of my wife's diary with the ghastly * * * inserted by the Editor, with wicked cunning whenever he thought it good to pretend there was something too painful for the public eye. Blake, in fact, cooked the diary with

which I, as you know, was not unfamiliar. He even had the impudence to interpolate that well-known little poem beginning,

> "I sit and sigh in lonely grief
> And long for what can ne'er be mine."

Then he took her philosophy seriously, and hammered the crude fragments of essays she had left into very telling articles. Nor did he fail to discover that as a philosopher she had reached the condition of "neo-scientific idealism," whatever that may mean. At all events it became quite the thing, in certain cultured sets, where a knowledge of Herbert Spencer's works is *de rigueur*, for the young women to describe themselves as "neo-scientific idealists."

But what harmed me most was the misrepresentation of an incident recorded thus by Blake: "When Lady Gertrude's admirable work, the 'Evolution of Conduct,' was refused by one publisher after another, because they erroneously believed the public took no interest in great questions of philosophy, however grandly treated, the authoress, then in a depressed state of health from overwork and domestic worry, received the following brutal note from one to whom she had every right to look for love, protection, encouragement and comfort. My whole nature recoils with indignation and disgust as I transcribe it: 'Now that all the leading publishers have kicked out your "Evolution of Conduct," don't you think we might hand it over to C—— to twist into curl-papers?'" It is at this point that Gertrude is supposed to "sit and sigh in lonely grief," and that Blake, in a passage of great eloquence and power denounced me. "Miserable man!" he cried, apostrophising me in the words of Shelley,

"you, one of the meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God. Nor shall it be your excuse that, murderer as you are, you have spoken daggers, though used none."

What could I do? Blake had not openly said I had written the note. To write to the papers and point out the note was a little joke which Gertrude had not appreciated, owing to her singular lack of humour, would be to make matters worse. The wicked shaft shot in darkness had transfixed me. In every leading paper in England the note was quoted, and what was beyond the powers of all the thunders of "The Umpire," one lying paragraph achieved. Blake built my Calvary and crucified me. A heedless note, copied into a hypochondriacal diary, in a moment of petulance by a woman who had once loved me, was my cross!

After this my friends turned their backs on me. The wretched adventurers with whom I had consorted, and whom I despised, fell away from me, and howled at me in obscure prints. The men at my clubs were ashamed to be seen talking to me; my own family shrunk from me in the storm of opprobrium. Though I faced it bravely, in England, I could not but perceive my career was gone. Six long months after the book was published, whilst I was sitting in my chambers in the Temple, sadly brooding on my fate, I received the following cablegram from New York: "Silas died yesterday. Come to the one friend left you."

* * * * * *

O, the green islands in the ocean of sorrow, where the sirens laugh, rosy-bosomed and joyous! there the storm-tossed voyager may rest his head!

O, Mimi! innocent cause of my overthrow, but so-

lace of my wounded heart! Your beauty is not so dazzling, perhaps, as when we first basked together in the sunshine at Chamonix, but your wealth is great, and jealousy a bitter and ugly thing you do not know.

As I write these lines, I am sitting by the open window of her—may I not say our?—lovely villa at Cannes. Outside is sunshine, for it is March, and the spring is hurrying on with the passionate fervour of the south. In the garden she is seated with Prince Groffenski, who has just lost £20,000 at Monte Carlo, and now is seeking, as he says in his odd, foreign way, "Consolation in the smiles of beauty." How the blue sea sparkles! how the roses scent the garden! there is the lunch-bell. Bah! I am sick of my country, its cant, its politics, its lies, its grim climate! It is all too narrow for me—for have I not become a citizen of the world? Yes, reader, I have developed from a suburban caterpillar to that rarest thing—a man!

But here we must part. These papers, written in vindication of my life, will clear my memory in the eyes of the candid and unprejudiced, as for the others —well! as Mimi says in her *Palais Royal* French, of which she is so proud, "*Je ne m'en fiche pas mal!*"

THE END.

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